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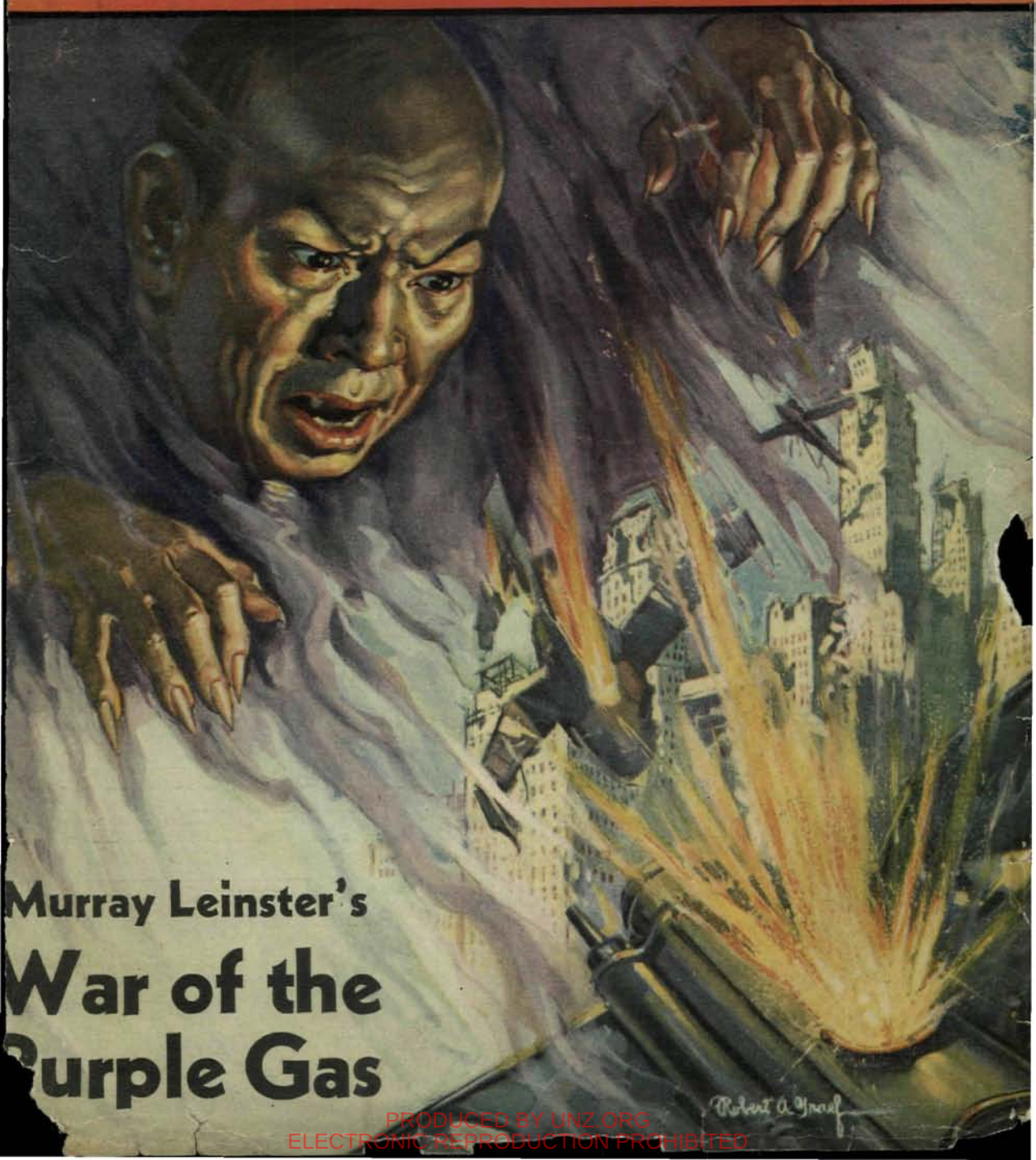

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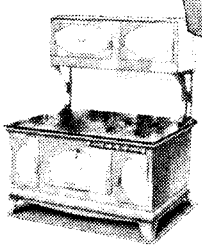

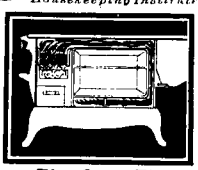

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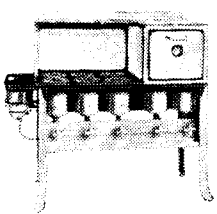

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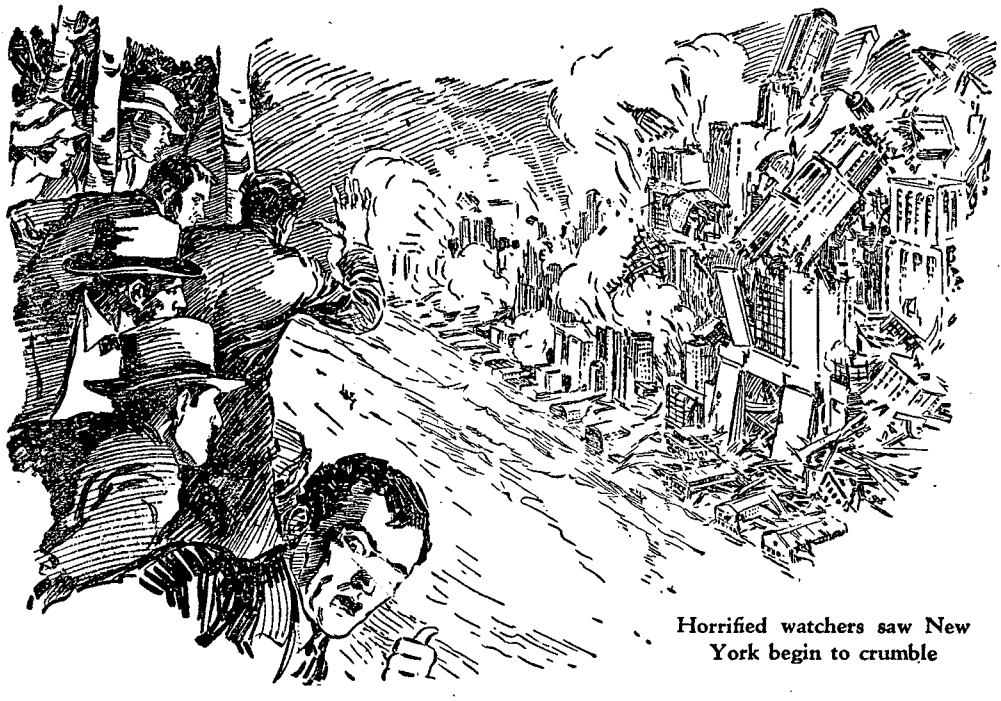

Horrified watchers saw New York begin to crumble

War of the Purple Gas

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "The Earth-Shaker," "The Sleep Gas," etc.

A world rocked in chaos as the Orient declared war on America

CHAPTER I.

DEATH FROM THE SKIES.

SOMEWHERE off in the darkness a plane gunned off the ground and its motor-roar died abruptly to the soft whisper of a modern fighting-plane in flight. Somewhere else a mechanical riveter grunted quietly to itself, as it heated rivets and rivet-hole at once with eddy-currents and then welded rivet and plates together with a single powerful push.

A monorail truck with a load of plates for the ZS-11—hardly more than a skeleton framework, so far—hummed softly by. Barrack-windows glowed, the changing tint of their lights and the monotonous throbbing music from within them proving that the off-duty men were tuned in on wha-wha dances, the fad of the year in 1952, only last year, in which the music was mostly visual and the dancers wise-cracked in rhythm.

Footsteps on a graveled walk. A challenge, in front of the commanding officer's hut. A curt answer, and the door of the C. O's hut opened as the rifle went back to "shoulder arms" from "present." Commander Pete Lomas stepped inside and nodded to his friend, Lieutenant Sid Terrill.

Note: This narrative is from the ARGOSY for February 1st and following issue, in the year 1953, by permission of the editors.

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"One more squadron of fighters on duty overhead now," he observed, "and two more on the way. I had a hell of a time convincing Washington. I came over with the squadron leader. He landed me."

Sid Terrill made a painful attempt at flippancy.

"And did you think to mention a mere brother, talking to Danny?"

Pete sat on a chair and drummed on the table.

"I didn't get her. Through to Sin-King all right. Perfectly clear contact. I could count the hairs on that damned interpreter's moles. But he said atmospheric conditions prevented a contact with Danny. Then he beamed at me and said, 'Pellaps tomollow.'"

There was a pause. Lieutenant Sid Terrill said gloomily:

"It looks bad."

"Damned bad," said Pete. "—There's a conference of the Kin Lung with the President to-night. The Kin Lung is broadcasting it all over New Asia, so the President had to broadcast it here. It starts in fifteen or twenty minutes. It rates emergency. It'll be all over the screen."

He drummed on the table again.

"Look here, Sid! We've got lift-generators in seven ships, but propulsion in only three. Do you think that if—if, I say—there's a blow-up to-night we could get them aloft and somewhere else? The Kin Lung's got some new fighting weapon we don't know anything about. I'm uneasy. Do you think we could get some of the ships away?"

"I'd hate to try it," said Sid. "What's that?"

There was a momentary drumming roar aloft. A second. A third . . . Pete counted them. Twenty-four ships in all.

"Another squadron overhead, reporting. The other'll be along in a minute or two. If there's war, Sid, they'll aim for this camp first, and the Army wants to find out what the Kin Lung's new trick is. He'll probably use it on us. That argument got us the planes."

Sid nodded. Then he swallowed.

"But Pete . . . If there's war, with Danny over there in New Asia . . . What'll happen to her?"

"In theory," said Commander Pete Lomas harshly, "they'll intern her and your uncle. In theory! In practice, Sid, God knows! Don't you think," he demanded bitterly, "I've been worrying about that?"

"It's a swell mess, for us," said Sid. He tried hard to be flippant. "But I guess we're acting like a couple of old women."

"I hope so!" But Pete Lomas stirred. "I'm scared to death about Danny," he said grimly, "but I've got to think about the ships. If the Kin Lung's fleet tries to get this camp, they can do it. Especially if they've something new we don't know how to fight. And if your sister and the girl I want to marry is—is—"

HE settled down desperately to calculation and estimate, with excellent reason to be unable to put his mind on either. Because Danny—Danaë—Terrill was in New Asia just then, and on the eighth of June, in 1952, people who had friends or relatives in New Asia had cause for worry. Pete and Sid had more cause than most, because Danny was the sister of the one and the fiancée of the other, and they were building the battle-cruisers of the air the Kin Lung objected to.

This was in mid-summer, and just about six months after Simpkins's brave but foolhardy attempt to reach the moon in his inadequately prepared space-ship. Every one remembers that tragedy, when for three weeks the world literally watched through the eyes of the great telescopes as the tiny sphere sped out and out from earth, with her crew sickening and at last dying of what we now know were cosmic-ray burns. All the world saw the first space-sphere crash on the

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great plain south of Tycho, and the expanding cloud of vapor which proved its destruction. All the world mourned for Simpkins, but not all the world knew that he was a patriot as well as a scientist and the first man to reach—however fatally—any heavenly body other than the earth.

It was Simpkins's patriotism which had made possible the ships Pete was constructing. Simpkins's discovery of the rotation of electromagnetic reaction in a field of static stress was the exclusive secret of the United States. The first twelve ships built to utilize it were constructed in strictest secrecy in a hidden construction-camp in the Catskills under Pete's direction. They were the most deadly weapons known to have been made by man. And they were the cause of strained relations between the United States and New Asia.

Exchanges between the two nations, however, had been less than cordial for some time. The American economic policy was the complete exclusion of all foreign goods from our shores, which had produced a financial crisis of two years' standing in New Asia. It had fostered, in fact, the coming to power of the Kin Lung, first as dictator in China despite his Japanese birth, and then as Shogun in Japan in a bloodless revolution which returned the Mikado to the retirement of his ancestors. The Kin Lung — "Golden Dragon" — ruled, but his hold upon his followers depended upon a startling and usually truculent demeanor toward whoever could be blamed for the evils affecting his nation. And as America was the bugbear of New Asia in 1952, he thrilled his followers regularly by bellicose pronouncements attacking her policy.

It was in May—May 15th, to be exact—that he made his most fiery speech, when dedicating the national capitol at the new city of Sin-King. "We have suffered in patience," he declared belligerently, "the acts showing the evident desire of America that Asia shall collapse. We have endured privations, we have submitted to poverty, rather than take to the sword.

"But America will be wise to remember that New Asia is *New* Asia, no longer passively accepting Fate, but shaping it! We have endured, but we will not permit our strength to be sapped while we endure! We will not be destroyed by a war of commercial attrition! If there is to be war, we of New Asia shall determine the form it will take! And America is leaving us little choice between destruction and the sword!"

The speech was somewhat more fiery than usual, to be sure. The Kin Lung's followers needed ever stronger phrasing. But unfortunately, political reasons required a cabinet minister of the United States to make a fiery speech within a week thereafter. And he made it. So that Pete Lomas, with the responsibility of the air-cruisers on his shoulders and Danny Terrill in New Asia, had read the cabinet minister's stupendous blunder in the morning papers.

"If New Asia wants war, she shall have it!" declared the gentleman, needing to influence votes. "Our Army and Navy are ready, though reduced. But we have not weakened ourselves for economy. We have great air-cruisers now near completion before which the world may well tremble. They are of five thousand tons displacement! They carry four-inch ferridium armor, armament which makes them the equal of any sea-battleship afloat, and five hundred tons of bombs apiece! These ships are built through America's possession of the secret by which the recent disastrous flight to the moon was made, and they will prove disastrous to any nation which challenges the power or the policy of America!"

JINGOISM, pure and simple. Politics, neither simple nor pure. It was no more and no less provocative than the fulmination of the Kin Lung, but it was stark insanity because the ships weren't ready to take the air. And there were rumors of a new weapon the New Asians had, on which they counted heavily. Official Washington became beside itself at the military stupidity of a political oracle, but the damage was done.

The Kin Lung had his forces ready for action, knew the American ships were not completed, could envision their power when they were finished—and

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could prevent their completion if he struck in time. His readiness to take action showed up only two nights after the American politician's speech, when the sky above the construction-camp seemed to split wide open in a monstrous blaze of light which required no interpretation. Somebody had set off a five-hundred-pound magnesium bomb to get a flash photo from ten thousand feet.

Four air-squadrons now slithered silently through the air above the camp to prevent a repetition or improvement on that performance, but the damage was done.

Sid Terrill turned on the vision-set next the window. The conference broadcast was just beginning and was all over the screen. As he enlarged a frame and cut in the voices the official announcer said: *"With this summary of preceding events, I retire, announcing to you the President of the United States."*

The President smiled from the vision-screen, and Sid Terrill said with a forced facetiousness:

"Kind sir, please stall off a war for just about two weeks. We need that much chance to organize, since you've cut the Army and Navy to nothing."

The President announced the Kin Lung, who appeared. The screens shifted to a new position, and the illusion of watching the two men conferring face to face was complete. Half the screen showed the President's office in the White House, and the other half showed the Kin Lung's audience room in his palace in Sin-King.

From the beginning, the thing looked ominous. The Kin Lung scowled, in the ancient costume he had revived which showed no trace of Western influence. The *Tao*—that curious symbol whose elaborate misinterpretation made it the symbol of his cause—stared out from his breast. He spoke impatiently, and his interpreter translated a fulsome compliment after the formal manner of the East. The President replied, and his interpreter translated an equally polite and equally meaningless reply. Then the Kin Lung barked:

"Let us speak truth! A cabinet minister of your nation describes weapons preparing for our national destruction, as your economic policy has been made for the destruction of our commerce. In the name of New Asia I demand assurance that the United States does not plan the conquest of Asia!"

The President explained very suavely that the ships made up for recent reductions in American military and naval forces. No more.

"We of New Asia," said the Kin Lung sardonically, "would also be glad to reduce our army and navy if we could be equally well protected by a smaller force. If the friendship of the United States is actual, then will you help us to those economies? Will you give us plans for similar ships?"

The President explained that the method of lift was a state secret, a military secret, which he could not share without action from Congress.

"Then when will Congress give you that authority?" demanded the Kin Lung arrogantly.

It would take time to summon Congress, and even then the President could not guarantee . . .

The Kin Lung cut him short.

He stood up, his hands clenched theatrically.

"Delay!" he said contemptuously. "Delay and more delay while your ships are completed so we will be at your mercy! We of New Asia have suffered by the closing of your markets to us. We have endured that! But now your own officials have described weapons forging for our destruction, and I say to you and all your people that we will not endure it!"

He struck the table beside him with his clenched fist. Instantly the speakers crashed with a sound like a discordant gong, and the New Asian half of the screen went blank.

SID reached over and turned off the set. He was very pale.

"Danny's in New Asia," he said unsteadily, "and that maniac is in control over there. Pete, it's going to be war, and damned quick, and—and I'm not afraid of war, but I'm afraid for Danny!"

Pete said between clenched teeth:

"There's no excuse for harm to her,

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Sid. She's a girl. She went to New Asia with your uncle, who was invited by the Kin Lung himself. And he's no military man. He's a spectroscopist, a scientist! There's no possible excuse to intern them, even. They'll be sent off somewhere—Java, maybe, with the other civilians in New Asia. They'll be safe."

"Do you believe that, Pete?" asked Sid, almost hoarsely.

"I'm—trying to," said Pete grimly. "But look here, Sid! We've got to think of our duty! If there's war, these ships are the most important things on earth to America! And I've got more than a hunch that the Kin Lung won't wait for a formal declaration of war to try to get them!"

He stood up and jammed on his uniform cap.

"I don't dare think!" he said savagely. "But what ships can lift themselves have to be gotten ready to be towed away from here if bombing starts. Take a crew and start loading them with all the tools you can, at short notice. I'm going out to organize things."

The two of them emerged into the open. The camp was oddly silent, though that riveter still grunted to itself. Overhead, tiny stars blinked completely out and then shone forth again at erratic, unrhythmic intervals. The fighting planes above caused their flickering.

The barracks were quiet, too. Few people felt like music after the Kin Lung broadcast.

Pete went into the farther barrack. Men were talking disputatiously. Somebody called *"Shun!"* but an angry hum still filled the place when Pete said curtly:

"Rest!"

"Look here, Commander," said somebody furiously. "We' been lissenin' to that yeller—"

"So have I," said Pete crisply. "And we've got to show some action in consequence. First—"

He gave a swift stream of orders. When the men poured from the barracks to carry them out, the gang from the other barrack was already at work. An ordered pandemonium broke out. Somewhere a Diesel turbine coughed and barked and began to hum. Lights flared momentarily in one of the long, sleek, glistening hulls. A monorail purred to position and men began to heap tools and equipment upon it.

A second Diesel began its musical note. A third . . .

Then, very suddenly, a flare of fierce white light appeared overhead and spread instantly to fill all the sky. A pitiless glare outlined the men working in the camp. Infinitely black shadows made their forms seem angular, their features harsh, their movement abrupt and clumsy. From high aloft came the faint popping noise which was the ignition-report of the flare.

"Speed it up!" said Pete. "There's one of the Kin Lung's ships to bomb us now. But we've got a fleet up there too. They'll fight for us."

HE knew that somewhere up aloft the Kin Lung's planes hurtled forward to drop destruction, and that an American plane dived even then for the flare to blast it out of existence. But even an instant of that savage light meant damage done. Half a second for sighting . . . There was the thin, shrill, descending whine of something plunging down and down and down . . . The first bomb. Half a second had been enough.

The flare flew to bits as an American plane got to it, and light like the end of all creation filled the sky. Blank darkness fell, only to be broken by the terrific explosion of that first bomb. The ground shook. Earth and stone and trees went flying through the air. Bits of steel shrieked and clanked against ferridium armor. And through the pandemonium came other shrill whines which rose in pitch as the velocity of their fall increased.

Explosions sounded aloft now, too. There had been four squadrons of American fighting planes soaring soundlessly over the camp to guard it. And they did not wait for diplomatic negotiations before plunging into battle. The heavy-armed ships sent sudden streaks of savage light darting through the heavens, and where those streaks found a New Asian plane a hail of explosive bullets

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and light shell followed. Bombs went off with shattering concussions, huge "ash-cans" of detonating stuff whose utter violence of explosion would sometimes blast the fabric from a flier's wings. They were the equivalent of the depth-bombs of an earlier war. Machine guns stuttered. The stars paled by comparison with the streakings of tracer bullets. And once action was joined, all silencing devices were cut out for greater power, and a dreadful humming buzz filled all the firmament.

It was a colossal roaring, an overpowering drone, a numbing thunder to which even the noise of battle seemed but a background.

The terrific explosions from overhead, though, were but trivial things when compared with the monstrous detonations in the camp itself. Bombs fell there with a savage persistency. Designed to destroy heavily armored hulls, they blasted out craters to be measured in hundreds of feet. And they came down, and came down, and came down, each fall followed by an explosion greater than that of an old-fashioned arsenal blowing up.

The camp crew worked like madmen. Buffeted by concussion-waves when they were not overwhelmed by billows of earth and débris, deafened and blinded and wounded by missiles ranging from grains of sand to jagged plates and girders of ferridium, they fought to save the ships. Three gleaming hulls swung crazily up from the ground and hovered uncertainly at a height of thirty to forty feet. Men surged about them. They improvised cables. They invented grapples. They performed feats of genius between the blasts which destroyed them.

And then a great globe of yellow flame appeared and grew, high in the air, and a myriad motes danced about it in the never-ending thunder of the engines. Some of those motes carried the star insignia of American planes. Others defiantly displayed the *Tao* of New Asia. And sparks spouted from each of them, and explosions licked about every one. Then the great globe of yellow fire began to fall, and fall, and lengthened to a tremendous streamer of lambent flame. It looked like a comet the instant before it struck the earth and was blown into a million pieces.

CHAPTER II.

NEW YORK'S DOOM.

IN the dawnlight Sid Terrill looked ghastly when he limped back into the camp—or what was left of it. He found Pete with a dirty bandage about his neck, supervising and helping to dig into a huge pile of débris.

"Reporting, sir," said Sid formally, "of the seven hulls we got away from the camp last night, six are in fairly good shape. A direct hit landed on the other."

"Right," said Pete abstractedly. "Here, heave up on that beam and we'll be able to get to him, anyhow."

Four grimy, blood-besmeared men heaved obediently, and Pete dived under a precariously upheld heap of plates and beams and other litter. He came out again, composed but grim.

"No use—yet," he said. "His head's gone. That was Walker, wasn't it?" He made a note in a soiled notebook. "I think that winds up this part of it. Forty-seven of us left here alive. How many with you, Sid?"

"Eighteen," said Sid Terrill. He gulped. "Nine of us are almost whole. The rest are pretty much smashed up."

"We've got twelve men who won't have to be hospitalized," said Pete. "Thirty-five stretcher cases. There were two hundred and three of us last night. I'll go make my report."

One of the four grimy men said:

"Sir, there's blood runnin' outa your shoe. Willya please, sir, get y'self fixed up? We'll feel better, too."

"Thanks." Pete grinned without mirth. "I will. If you can find some rifles, you might mount a guard. Two men will do. There's not much left that a spy could get any good from examining."

He walked over to a gyro that had landed on a tiny patch of still-solid ground within the camp's limits. Sid Terrill limped dutifully after him. Pete took the radiophone and reported, then asked for help.

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"A working-party from the Brooklyn navy yard will do, sir. Better give me about sixty men. Riveters, torches and wiring equipment are our most pressing needs in the way of tools. But we'll need some duplicate motors and—wait a bit. Sid, how near are the lift and propulsion generators installed in our wrecks?" He listened to the reply and turned to the phone again. "For emergency navigation, sir, we can do with four thousand-kilowatt generators and what spare parts would go with them. I mean turbo-generators, of course. A longer list will come later. Signing off."

He turned again to Sid.

"I gather," he said wryly, "that our government sent a demand to the Kin Lung to know if this attack on our camp is intended as a declaration of war. And he replied that it isn't. It's a 'protest of action,' to indicate the firmness of the New Asian resolve to defend themselves. I would say that their resolves are pretty firm."

He looked about the wrecked camp. And as the dawnlight grew, the utter chaos, the illimitable desolation of the scene of the night attack became more clear. Where the camp had been, a lamp-standard stood upright with an awkward bend in its shaft where some flying missile had struck it. A tool shed remained miraculously untouched. A generator shed still existed, but it had no roof and exactly one side-wall, and two men were shoveling dirt from about the generator to see how much other damage had been done.

A section of monorail track still ran some sixty feet, from an inextricable tangle near one bomb-crater to the blasted edge of another. But that was all. For the rest there was only raw yellow earth and naked stone. But on the edge of the camp lay the blackened remnants of a New Asian plane, and scattered here and there for miles about were others—save that some of the wrecks had borne the star and circle insignia of America.

THE ambulance planes came, and went away again in a racing cloud of silver wings. And Pete nodded tiredly, looking at the few men who remained with him.

"Now we'll tackle the ships again."

And Sid Terrill led the way in limping triumph to the removed monsters. Seven of them, in all, had had their lift-generators installed, and of the seven, six remained.*

They were not yet tested, nor their controls calibrated. The installations in two of them were not even taped for final insulation. But the night before, with half-ton bombs crashing all about and in the camp, somehow those seven ships had been shackled together and, wabbling hideously in the air, had been towed out of the camp. Their propulsion-generators could not be used for lack of controls. Only the shackling of the lot of them made it possible for the lift-generators to be used. But the several errors of the lift-operators practically cancelled each other, and in much the manner of a small child handling seven large and unruly dogs—dragged here and there and everywhere and sometimes lifted off the ground—a ten-ton tractor had hauled them to comparative safety.

Fifteen minutes after Pete finished his inspection, the working party began to arrive by plane from Brooklyn. Sid and the camp's survivors took them in hand. Pete's orders were explicit. Get lift and propulsion generators in operation in each hull. Install controls of any sort that would work. Disregard efficiency,

*The action of the Simpkins lift-generators is simple enough. Normally, a current-carrier in a magnetic field tends to move at right angles to the lines of magnetic force, and the magnet tends to move oppositely to the current-carrier. This is the principle by which electric motors to run under 5,000 r. p. m. are still made. But when the current-carrier is, in addition to field of magnetism, in a superimposed field of electrostatic stress, when that stress reaches 10,000 volts per millimetre of dielectric, the current-carrier is repelled from the magnet, but the magnet is not repelled from the current-carrier. It still tends to move only at right angles to the lines of magnetic force. Obviously, then, a Simpkins lift-generator is simply a bi-polar magnet with a lift-armature above it in an electrostatic field. The practical difficulties connected with the maintenance of that field in spite of induced ionization in the dielectric have only recently been settled to the satisfaction of scientists, but from the beginning, the Simpkins lift-generators were dependable and many times as efficient as any lifting devices of wings or gas-bags could possibly be.

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accuracy, and the traditions of good craftsmanship. The workmen could take as their motto, "Safety last!" But get the ships able to take the air, however precariously, and to be navigable, however clumsily.

He saw the work started. A squadron of supply planes began to dump tools, dynamos, small and large turbo-generators and all manner of miscellaneous equipment. A staff plane brought the members of a board of inquiry to make a survey and report of the damage done and to inform Pete confidentially that Washington had gone crazy. All the pacifists in the nation were bombarding the administration with telegrams and resolutions demanding a policy of non-resistance. All the patriotic societies of the country were similarly demanding war, on the instant and to the hilt. And the board of inquiry gave Pete his orders to go down to Washington at once for conference with the War Board.

He went, in the thirty-foot experimenal vessel which was then the only craft in the world navigating exclusively by Simpkins generators both for lift and propulsion. He conferred with the War Board. He reported that the New Asians had not used any unfamiliar weapon. If their great surprise existed, they still kept it in reserve. But half-ton bombs had done damage enough.

HE was excused from the War Board, and instantly went to International Television and asked for the completion of a delayed call to Sin-King to Danny Terrill.

The officials of International Television were skeptical, but they tried it, in spite of arbitrary censorships and freakish refusals to accept calls in New Asia. And to Pete's unhopeful surprise, the screen in the little cubbyhole lighted up and Danny looked out of it, smiling at him.

"Hello, Danny," said Pete, with a lump in his throat. "Sid and I have been anxious about you. You're all right?"

Danny spoke, smiling, but no answer came. An instant later the high-pitched voice of an interpreter said:

"Militaly censolship prevents dilect speech. Miss Tellil says she is well an' comfortable."

Pete swore internally, but put a good face on it.

"Professor Anderson's all right, too?"

Again Danny spoke, and again the interpreter's voice.

"The plofessol is well and making most satisfactoly expeliments. He is working with Toyen Itso, the gleat New Asian physicist, as you know."

Pete had not seen Danny in the flesh for eight months, nor on television for nearly six weeks. And, worried as he was, the sight of her under any conditions was a godsend. She looked relieved to see him well and seemingly unharmed — he'd hidden the bandage around his neck beneath his collar—and he saw the gladness in her eyes. Now he clung hungrily to the connection, feasting his eyes upon her face, though she was in a country shortly to be the enemy of his own. He asked question after question, inane and futile, simply to keep her face before his eyes. It was talk of a sort to bore any third party, and presently the interpreter said tolerantly:

"The convelsation not being on militaly subjects, dilect speech will plobably do no harm."

A click, and Danny's voice came. Pete hung on her words as she told him Professor Anderson, her uncle, was happy as a child with the new instruments Toyen Itso had contrived in the laboratory to which the American had been called some eight months before. Toyen Itso had aroused his enthusiasm. She chattered on, her eyes fixed on Pete, and a sudden alarm filled him. She was going to try to get him a message through the censorship! Her eyes were warning him! And suddenly she said quickly:

"Pete, they're going to—"

Click! Her face vanished. And the face of a spectacled interpreter appeared in its place, wearing a satisfied smile.

"Miss Tellil tried to give infolmation of militaly importance," he said blandly. "She is being placed under allest. No mole speech can be had with her."

And then the screen went finally dead.

Pete went desperately out of the booth to find the television office in a turmoil.

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With the cutting of his contact, every other contact with New Asia ceased to be. As he protested, circuit after circuit tested dead. New Asia had cut itself off from the world. Every station west of Hawaii and north of Indo-China ignored all calls.

The President greeted Pete hurriedly, and even more hurriedly dismissed him. His secretaries were already swamped with threats of adverse votes if war " for any cause, with any nation " came about. A highly diplomatic note to the Kin Lung awaited his signature. But if the Kin Lung cut all communications he obviously intended to do something . . .

Uneasiness swept the country. Instead of sending the placatory note, the President could do nothing but order the mobilization of every available fighting unit. The Navy loaded fuel and ammunition with feverish haste. Induction-screens went up all over the country and sirens howled air-raid warnings from tramp planes off the air-ways, producing bombing scares by hundreds.

BUT no bomb-raids came. For two days New Asia remained utterly silent. No trans-Pacific air-liners left its ports. Its frontiers closed like steel traps. Its broadcasting stations ceased even to send out carrier-waves. It became an utter vacuum of news; one-fourth of humanity cut off from all the rest.

Only whispers leaked out to the outer world. Hidden secret service transmitters sent out hints of vast troop movements, naval mobilizations, of the execution of Europeans as spies. One by one they cut off abruptly as their beams betrayed them. The last one to operate—a supersonic set in a sub-cellar in Canton—told of high-sounding announcements by the Kin Lung in which he referred to New Asian weapons beside which the American air fleet was a toy. This station was bombed by the Kin Lung's counter-espionage serivce as it began the feverish transmission of a report opening: *" Extremest urgency! The new weapon is—"*

Then there was silence throughout New Asia. It lasted for forty-eight hours, until the Kin Lung demanded a final conference with the President of the United States.

Pete Lomas and Sid Terrill did not even listen to this one. They were suffering like men stricken and working like men gone mad. Danny Terrill arrested in New Asia. As a spy. Europeans being shot as spies . . . Pete assigned a petty officer to listen in on the conference, and did not even turn his eyes from the work in hand when the report came.

The Kin Lung had formally issued an ultimatum on whose terms alone peace could be maintained between the United States and New Asia. The terms were almost incredible. Destruction of the air cruisers. Surrender of their plans. Alteration of the tariff which had cut off the American market for New Asian goods. Indemnity for the commercial loss caused by that tariff.

And, most incredible of all, the Kin Lung demanded the right of extra-territoriality for all New Asians in America. This last was a neat inversion of the privilege Europeans had once enjoyed in China. The Kin Lung gave the President five minutes in which to accept the terms. The President was legally unable to do so, even if he would. And the Kin Lung scornfully declared war and cut the broadcast.

" All right," said Pete exhaustedly. He raised his voice to the working party. " War's declared! We've been working like hell. Now we've got to work to beat hell! Come on! All hands! Load 'em up! Quick! We're going to get aloft!"

And somehow, they never knew how, the men about the six remaining ships managed to put on an extra knot of speed and loaded into the ships every tool, every bit of material, every ounce of fuel and every particle of supplies that remained available. There were seventy-one men all told in the ships. They made up the most skeletonized of crews for navigation. They could not fight at all, even if the ships were armed. But Pete had managed to imbue them with his own grim belief that on them hinged the fate of the United States, and they accepted his demand for miracles with a rather insane confidence.

Within half an hour, the need for miracles manifested itself. Technically, a

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state of war came into being at 12.01, U. S. Eastern Standard time, on June 10th, 1952. At 12.31 exactly, just half an hour later, the Kin Lung struck a staggering blow.

NEW YORK lay serene and beautiful beneath the summer sun. Its lace-like maze of spires and buttresses reached only from the Battery to 125th Street, but it was still the greatest city in the world. Above 125th Street the roof-level dropped. There were only twelve buildings higher than sixty stories north of that point, and the real peak of the artificial mountain range was the Whilon Building, whose two hundred and forty stories rose from a base pierced by the earth-level highways from Forty-second to Forty-eighth.

The aerial ways soared from a terrace-level only three hundred feet high at 125th Street to the pleasure-boulevard more than two thousand feet above earth-level among the great unit-structures near midtown. Twenty public landing fields dotted the city, besides the myriad of pocket fields for the dwellers in each unit. Above the city, fliers danced like motes in the sun. The long black trans-Atlantic Express was just soaring down to cross the city at the five-thousand-foot level. Its rearmost section spread huge wings and zoomed clear, then began to glide down smoothly to the great Export landing field above what was once Wall Street.

Then the bomb struck. The evidence is conclusive that it was a single bomb. Something came shrieking down from illimitable heights overhead. There are some inhabitants of the Jersey shore who claim they saw the sunlight glitter upon it as it fell, but that is improbable. It must have been dropped from fifty thousand feet, at least, for the carrier-fleet to have escaped observation by the smuggler-patrol. Military observation had not yet, for lack of time, been instituted. The bomb came down, shrieking, and struck a flying buttress of the Whilon Building. It crashed through seventeen stories of that buttress before it exploded. And then the devastation began.

A plume of an ominous purple vapor was seen to spout skyward. A vortex-ring a quarter of a mile across went swirling upward into the sky, to expand to half a mile or more and slowly descend again upon the city. The buttress of the Whilon Building shuddered and collapsed, and a vast, roughly globular mass of the same thick, purple vapor was seen to be expanding.

So far, there was only tragedy. A thousand occupied rooms collapsed with that one buttress. No one knows the casualty list from the explosion alone. But the after-effects made it seem trivial.

As the purple gas expanded, the startled watchers on the Jersey shore rubbed their eyes. The austerely sharp outlines of the Whilon Building blurred. The building seemed to settle queerly. It seemed to bulge, to move in all its parts. It appeared to shrink in the fashion of a snow-fort in bright sunlight, but much more quickly. And suddenly—it was so horrible that men could not believe their eyes—the huge Whilon Building settled into a heap of utterly shapeless débris. It looked exactly as if every particle of iron and steel in its whole mass had melted to the strength and consistency of putty. The aerial highways sagged and broke, spilling dots which were vehicles upon them. The topmost tip of the building sank out of sight behind other structures yet remaining, and above it was a spreading cloud of purple gas.

BUT the horror was not yet ended. The Burbank Building, second tallest of the city's structures, suddenly buckled as the purple gas eddied about its base. It bent, and leaned, and leaned still farther, with its buttresses falling away from it in a ghastly semblance of liquefied ivory, and swayed inward to vanish in what was already a puddle of shattered building-material and men.

Then the Kyrie Building fell, and those who watched from the built-up tops of the Palisades saw the seeming liquefaction of a city's inhabited structures move outward, slowly, as the cloud of gas expanded . . . It looked as if a gigantic, an unthinkable blow-torch were pouring down an invisible flame upon New York, and moving the flame slowly and very carefully, so that nothing would be left undestroyed.

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But we know of the destruction of New York. It is still fresh in our memories. The Purple Gas seemed to lose its effectiveness when it had spread nearly to the Battery and a little beyond 125th Street. Between those lines was only chaos and death. Every bridge to Brooklyn fell splashing into the East River, and a good-sized section of Brooklyn itself collapsed.

Four of the Hudson River spans went down and — queerly, it seemed at that time — every one of the vehicular and railway tunnels caved in and let in the river waters. But perhaps the most pathetic aspect of the destruction was the fate of those people who got to their planes as the buildings settled and fell beneath them. The planes took off, fighting bravely to climb beyond the reach of the Purple Gas. It is not recorded that a single one escaped. They crumpled and fell as swiftly as the human beings who had trusted to escape in them.

That was in New York alone. But within the hour the untouched portions of the country knew that Denver, Chicago, Atlanta, St. Paul and San Francisco had similarly been reduced to ruins. In the stunned horror of those announcements, the nation hardly realized meaning in the news that the sea fleet of the United States in San Francisco harbor had shared the fate of the city, nor that the Great Lakes super-power stations no longer existed.

And nobody knew at all—or at any rate the broadcasts did not announce it—that six shining hulls in a precarious state of incompletion were aloft somewhere above the Atlantic coast-line. Held together by hawsers and chains, with scaffoldings clinging to some of them and pain in patches on others, they pointed successively to every point of the compass. They bumped and joggled as they floated incredibly aloft. They made crazy jerks up and down and this way and that. Sid Terrill, trying to be facetious, said they wabbled in the air like seasick elephants.

They went spinning and bumping down the coast while the clouds of Purple Gas arose and destroyed their nation. They were disreputable to look at and at no time more than one-half under control. They hid in the clouds when they could. But they were the only hope of America—and the sound of hammering came from their inwards.

CHAPTER III.

DEFIANCE.

A DIESEL turbine roared in the vast, empty interior of ZS-5. Somebody was hammering thunderously. The air was cold and thin. And streaks of an extraordinarily vivid sunshine came in through a so-far empty gun-port. The ship wabbled and dropped, then checked and resounded to terrific crashings as two sister-ships crashed against her. Pete Lomas twined his legs around a rough lumber railing and shouted into a transmitter:

"Making out, Sid?"

The vision-screen showed Sid's face, grimy but resolute.

"We'll do. Have you any idea where we are?"

"Eight thousand feet up," Pete told him. "Just getting to the south end of Albemarle-Sound. There's a thick cloud-bank ahead of us and two thousand feet higher. Pass the word to Number Three to put on a notch more speed ahead. This flying raft of ours is swinging around again."

"Nine's having trouble with the after lift-generator," said Sid savagely. "Static's dropped on them a couple of times. Something wrong with the insulation, somehow. I'm going to try to swing over. Get set to cut loose the cables if we go out of control, will you?"

"No," said Pete. "She's got forward propulsion. Put a man at the control. If that lift-generator conks out she'll drop by the tail. Jam on full speed ahead and she ought to float tail down."

"I'll try." Sid was still grim. "Pete, navigating these things is hell on wheels. We're either insane or geniuses. Think it over and tell me which, if you live and have time."

The screen went dark. Pete moved to a view-port and looked out. He saw something like a lunatic's dream. Below were the shallow reaches of the sound which lies between North Carolina and

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the sea. Pete could see the shadows of his ships, floating on the water. They were coupled together anyhow. Their composite outline looked rather like that of an intoxicated starfish. Never before in history had any man, and probably never again will any man, essay such navigation as was being done with the battle-cruiser squadron of the United States air fleet.

Three of the ships were as helpless aloft as any gas-balloon. Three hundred feet long and fifty feet in diameter, their shape was gracefully stream-lined, but their appearance as a whole was unspeakable. One was three-quarters painted, and the brilliant chromium plating of the balance looked insane.

Another was painted in sections only, and the bright plate looked leprous by contrast. Number Seven had scaffolding dangling from her rounded back. Four was splashed with dry red mud from a shell-burst of two nights before. Nine had an entrance-port stuffed open and a dangling mass of cables spilled out to hang down a hundred feet or more.

As Pete looked, he saw a hurtling figure drop from Three, apparently to destruction. His heart checked. Then he saw the rope by which that figure swung. It was Lieutenant Sid Terrill, dangling out of a rope in Three and trying to grasp at the untidy mass of cables from Nine as he swept past it. He oscillated horribly by a thread of rope, a mile and a half above-ground.

Three wabbled suddenly and jerked the cables out of his grasp as he swung in his monster arc. Again he missed them, and again. Then he clutched one—and it came spilling out of the port and covered him with loose rope. He untangled himself and let it fall. He seemed to be swearing. All his momentum was gone, now. He kicked in an undignified fashion, trying to set himself to swinging again. Then Nine wabbled obligingly, though in a heart-stopping fashion, and he caught the dangling mess. Swinging there, he hauled at the cables. Then he began to climb hand over hand. In seconds he had disappeared into the open port. Five minutes later he called Pete.

"Got it fixed," he reported grimly. "Nearly burnt my arm off doing it. I think we'll stay aloft a while longer."

"We're going up a couple of thousand feet," Pete told him. "That cloud bank ahead is going south. We'll hide in it. Right now we're just a nice mouthful for a one-man fighting plane. It doesn't look pretty, when you think of it, that Washington didn't even give us those combat groups they promised for protection."

UNCERTAINLY, uncomfortably, with wild lurchings and ceaseless wabbles, the six hulks drifted up another two thousand feet. Soft white vapor surrounded them. After sundry checkings of their course, Pete ceased to try to make distance with the propulsion-motors and rested content with the wind-sweep which carried them a little east of south at forty-five miles an hour.

It was slow, hideously slow, but with barely fifty hours between an air attack which had wiped out half the fleet, and the urgent necessity of getting the survivors aloft, there had been no possible chance to put in fine work. To get the ships aloft was the prime necessity. They were aloft. If together they constituted only a floating raft, with rather less maneuverability than a tub in a heavy sea, even then they were more nearly an asset to the United States than if they had stayed in their berths. There they would have been destroyed.

That was more than clear. As the ships floated uncertainly southward, the GC — General Communication — phones chattered the news of a nation paralyzed by the first blows of the Kin Lung's air fleet. The Purple Gas had descended simultaneously in a dozen of the main cities of the United States during the first hour of official warfare. In the twenty-four hours following, the Purple Gas shot up from ninety-three other spots, every one chosen for the strategic effect of its destruction.

It was not a deadly gas, in the ordinary sense of the word. Some few people, it is believed, were smothered by it when in its thickest concentration. But they were strangled, drowned in a gas which was not air. They were not poisoned. Human beings could breathe the Purple Gas mixed with air with apparent im-

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munity. But the gas wrecked forty cities outright, and made active warfare by the United States impossible.

Railroads broke down under the catastrophe of sagged rails and the destruction of bridges, locomotives and shops. After the super-power stations of the Great Lakes went out, bombs hurtled down unerringly upon the emergency-generators scattered here and there. The New Asians struck at the means of communication and of power-supply throughout the country with a precision which proved that their plan of campaign had been preparing for months, at least. They used their weapon with seemingly exact knowledge of its capabilities and effects, and with an amazing astuteness which made futile all the efforts of American scientists to understand it.

It was, apparently, something wholly new in the way of gases. It did not have any effect upon human beings, as a gas. It did not affect stone, glass, masonry, synthetic plastics, metals—in fact, except toward iron it seemed to be wholly inert. And the American chemists could not even find out how it affected iron.

In the presence of the Purple Gas all iron and iron alloys seemed to heat slightly, very slightly, and abruptly lose all self-cohesion. The metal became as soft as putty. Great buildings collapsed. Aerial highways and bridges crumpled and broke. Steel cables sagged and parted exactly as if they were made of dough instead of metal testing up to a hundred tons per square inch cross-section.

AMERICA was to all intents and purposes separated into a dozen sections, and the Purple Gas shattered all means of physical communication between those sections. In addition, the Kin Lung's men painstakingly shattered the nerve-center of each fragment. The catastrophe was complete. Laboratories which might have analyzed the Purple Gas were mostly in ruins. In San Francisco the Huntington Research Foundation outside the city escaped destruction for three days, and by what seemed at first the interposition of Providence a shipment of vacuum-bulbs was within reach of a research professor at the time of the destruction of the city.

He pinched off the tips of four bulbs, securing samples of the gas at what seemed the cost of certain death for himself. The gas did not harm him. He rushed the bulbs to the analytical labs, and the experts there made a hurried but accurate analysis. They found only oxidation-products of certain obscure organic compounds which assuredly should produce no such results as had been displayed. It was reported, however, that the gas had lost its effectiveness at the point where the samples were secured.

There again anomalies showed up. The gas, while in a larger sense horribly consistent in its effects, sometimes softened all iron while in concentrations too slight to be detected. And occasionally thick clouds of it, at the edge of an area of destruction, produced little or no result. Master-clocks in deep vaults, sealed in air-tight glass cases, turned to fused masses of useless metal. Reinforcing bars, deep-bedded in concrete, parted as readily as clean surfaces exposed to full concentration. But perhaps the most puzzling of all the hopelessly confusing features of the gas-effects was their impermanence.

Most of these anomalies turned up at the Philadelphia Arsenal, the storage-center for tanks and big guns for the Army, and for shells for four military districts. A Purple Gas bomb went off a quarter of a mile down-wind from the arsenal limits. The wind was blowing strongly, and seemingly blew the gas away from the arsenal altogether.

Nevertheless, the iron girders of the arsenal structures failed almost instantly, dumping down the roofs upon the contents and the occupants of the buildings. And out-of-doors, in the great concrete-paved storage parks where tanks stood in serried rows and big guns seemed to drowse beneath their canvas covers, the Purple Gas took immediate effect. The guns drooped. Their wheels and axles sagged. Of their own weight the mighty fighting machines collapsed into ill-defined puddles of apparently melted metal upon the floor, in which the outlines of their forms could just be made out. In the case of the Philadelphia Arsenal, it is known that within forty-five seconds the iron had re-hardened into its former

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strength, but in its new and useless shapes. And, just hardened from a plasticity nearly equal to its melted state, the iron was merely comfortably warm to the touch, no more.

ONE day, two days, three . . . The United States had fired no shot in its own defense. Its planes scoured the skies, to be sure, for the fleets carrying bombs of Purple Gas. And bits of iron and fabric and wood came down near Pittsburgh shortly after the Purple Gas struck its foundries. There were other rains of such fragments near Louisville, Ky., and Los Angeles. But they accounted for only parts of the American air fleets which took to the air and never returned. They had been attacked by the Purple Gas. Their motors had flown to pieces. Their steel guy-wires and junctions parted. They disintegrated in midair.

By the time the air cruiser squadron came to a temporary end of its voyaging, the six wabbling hulks were nearly all that remained of America's air force. They had headed valorously for a tiny islet in the Caribbean, on which nearly a century before a fort had been built. Fort Cadman. During the American Civil War, Fort Cadman was built at vast expenditure of labor and treasure, and to no particular purpose. It was abandoned twenty years later, and its huge casements served only to give shelter to occasional shark-fishers until the crazily navigated fleet under Pete Lomas bumped to an unsightly landing.

It was really more like a crash. The men in the cruisers rolled about like ninepins, and a casualty list of six broken legs, three smashed arms, a fractured jaw and bruises innumerable made the landing seem like a minor engagement.

The cavernous casemates of the old fort became a hospital, and the rest of the crews set to work to strip the parade ground of its growth of weeds and saplings, and then to turn those drying, shriveling remains into camouflage to hide the ships. Then they really set to work again.

Dynamos for lift-generators turned out current for strictly improvised furnaces. Control-motors turned extraordinarily into essential parts for lathes. Seventy-one men—even the cripples—flung themselves into the task of turning the helpless hulks into ships for the defense of an already conquered continent.

On the fourth day Pete took off in the little thirty-foot tender. Six hours later he landed on the roof of the Air Department building. Washington was untouched by the Purple Gas, but it seemed like a dead city. Its atmosphere was funereal and afraid. Pete went down to the Secretary for Aviation, and was greeted as one from the dead.

"I've got the ships down in Fort Cadman," he said briefly. "We've been working on them, and two of them have taken trial trips, at night. They are in fair shape. We need our armament and supplies. I've a long list of necessaries. Will you see they're shipped?"

The Secretary of Aviation said bitterly:

"Haven't you heard? We're licked! We've got just thirty-six hours to accept the Kin Lung's peace terms or he'll wipe out the rest of the country as he's wiped out—"

"Peace terms?" said Pete, stunned. "What battles have been fought? Where'd the fighting take place?"

"There's been no fighting," said the Secretary more bitterly still. "There've been only massacres. I thought they'd found your ships and smashed them. I'll take you to the Cabinet."

ON the way, he wearily told Pete the price of peace with the Kin Lung. Complete disarmament of America, already practically accomplished by the destruction of every fighting ship, nine tenths of the air forces, and all arsenals and manufactories of munitions. The removal of tariffs. Removal of all barriers to immigration. Reparations at a figure which would amount to a yearly tribute from America forever. Permission for the posting of New Asian garrisons wherever deemed necessary. And—ironically—a perpetual alliance with New Asia. . . . And, of course, the surrender of Pete's ships.

Pete was still stunned when he found the Cabinet as bitter and as dispirited as his own immediate superior.

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"We're waiting until our time expires," said the President, heavily, "but it's useless. We've got to give in. You might as well consider now, Commander, that you have your orders to surrender your ships when the Kin Lung appoints a place to receive them."

"My men will mutiny!" said Pete savagely. "We'll wreck them first! I couldn't carry out such orders if I would! If you order me to surrender those ships I tell you the whole fleet will mutiny!"

Silence fell. Suddenly the Secretary of the Navy leaned forward.

"Commander," he said softly, "there are others who feel as you do. And we have not yet accepted the enemy's terms, nor have you received your orders. If you go to Admiral Hayes, in charge of naval supplies, I imagine he may be as mutinous as you are. He might even find some other mutineers to steal for you what few guns and bombs and supplies are left. . . ."

But that was only a flash of spirit. Pete left the cabinet meeting sick at heart. Despair is contagious. But he saw Admiral Hayes and something of courage came back. Determination is contagious too. And Pete passed over his list of needed supplies, and embittered men saw that list and heard the plan and became enthusiastic in violating all rules of obedience and red tape and care for the conservation of the property of the Navy Department. Other men went swiftly to Baltimore harbor and commandeered a tanker which had miraculously escaped the devastation there.

Pete went streaking back through the darkness for Fort Cadman, knowing that the stolen tanker, loaded with stolen stores and guns and bombs, had already steamed down the Chesapeake in violation of all laws and orders, and would be out of the Capes by dawn. In four days more, or with luck in only three, the men at Fort Cadman would have helpers and materials to work with, too.

And Pete had one bit of personal information besides, though it was highly dubious in comfort-value. He had asked that a diplomatic inquiry be put through as to the fate of Danny Terrill and her uncle in New Asia. It had to go in a roundabout fashion, but a reply came just as he took off. Miss Danaë Terrill and Professor Anderson, the spectroscopist, were under arrest for having possessed themselves of military secrets. They would be held as perpetual prisoners of state in New Asia. No direct communication would be allowed with them at any time, for fear of cipher or other secret means of communication.

"Not dead," said Pete grimly, driving the tender four hundred miles an hour, with the gyros humming softly to keep it on its course. "Not dead, but prisoners for life. Because he's a spectroscopist? I doubt it. It's because Danny is Danny, and some damned yellow—"

He could not finish the thought, but it haunted him as if it would drive him mad. It made him a machine, incapable of fatigue, while they worked as they waited for the tanker to arrive with their stores and arms. It made him an implacable task-master when America—stricken and helpless—hopelessly accepted the terms imposed upon it. It kept him from the sick rage that filled all the rest of the camp—they were all mutineers now, by virtue of their failure to obey orders to surrender the ships—when a New Asian Provisional Governor landed at San Francisco and issued arrogant proclamations which had the force of law.

PETE was past the emotion of rage, and Sid with him. The tanker arrived, packed with men, and the mounting of guns and the loading of stores went on at one and the same instant. No one thought, even, of listening to the GC phone babbling forever of new disasters, new catastrophes, new humiliations imposed upon America as the result of a war in which not one bullet had been fired between the first air-raid and the signature of peace. The men most concerned missed entirely the savage methods used by the Kin Lung to force their surrender.

They learned of their danger only when a private plane, stolen by a noncommissioned officer of the Miami military post, came careering to a crash landing on the island. Its pilot came stumbling through the stubble on the parade ground to find Pete improvising a fire-control unit.

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"Are you guys crazy?" demanded the non-com hysterically. "Ain't you heard the whole New Asian air fleet is headed here? They bombed Detroit yesterday because Washington didn't either make you surrender or give up your location. They started on Kansas City this mornin' an' the President gave in. He told 'em, an' then to tip you, broadcast a GC order for you to surrender or announce what y' were goin' to do, an' y' didn't answer! My Gawd! What' you doin' hangin' around on the ground? Take the air, guy—an' make a place for me!"

Within two minutes the six cruisers were the focal points of streaming, struggling masses of men. In there, the first of them rose swiftly, poised and secure, in a beautiful upward sweep to five thousand feet. In five minutes the vision-phones repeated the cool report of Sid Terrill from aloft.

"They're coming. Ten flights of them in four levels. Thirty miles off. I suggest, sir, that we'd better get in formation."

A second ship rose swiftly. A third. Two more. Three. They ranged themselves in line abreast, no longer uncertain or unsure in any movement. Pete pushed the general order stud and spoke evenly:

"We should have the heels of them, but we're not going to run away. Two-hundred-yard intervals, frontal attack, fire at will from five thousand yards. Accelleration one-half normal to three-fifty miles an hour. Understood?"

Crisp answers. "Check, nine!" "Check, three!" "Check, seven!" and so on through the roll. The ships began to move toward the enemy, holding formation as if riveted together.

The men left behind on the tanker—they would fight, presently, and be killed to the last man when the New Asian moppers-up got there—saw the long, needle-like ships speed into action. They hit the New Asian line when it was a bare ten miles from Fort Cadman. They blew a terrific hole right through the center of it. But the New Asian planes were fast, and their pilots were game. In seconds the beautifully precise formation of American ships was the center of a hornets' nest of attacking planes which poured gun and shell-fire into them, and deluged them with bombs and every other artifice of destruction known to man. Then, suddenly, the Purple Gas spouted out in a vast, expanding sphere . . .

CHAPTER IV.

ON TO NEW ASIA!

A BITTER chill filled the ZS-5. Pete Lomas heard sounds, but they were thin and queerly muted. The musical hum of the Diesel turbines was faint. Black spots formed before his eyes and he deliberately panted for breath. That helped a little, but not much. He pressed the call-stud on the vision-phone.

"Pressure holding up, Sid?" he asked with a tremendous effort. "We're leaking air like a sieve."

"So are we," said Sid grimly. "Our outside barometer says eighteen thousand feet. We're barely holding pressure for twelve in the ship here."

"We're up to twenty-five," said Pete. Faintness assailed him. "And we can't hold out without air much longer. I'm going to try something." He pushed on the engine room call. A drawn and desperate face looked out at him. "We're only floating," said Pete effortfully. "But start up the propulsion turbine. Keep the generator cut off so there'll be no load on it. And then rob the supercharger of all the air you can take and still keep the turbine turning over. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Pete filled his lungs with the thin, unsatisfying air. He watched the inside barometer. The outer instrument registered twenty-five thousand feet, at which height no man could live without an artificial air supply. The inside-pressure barometer showed an air pressure equivalent to that at seventeen thousand feet. The needle crept over. Seventeen two. Two fifty. Three . . . Four . . . Seventeen thousand five hundred feet...

The thin sound of the extra turbine catching came to his ears. He struggled for breath and clarity of thinking while the lack of life-giving air sapped insidiously at his brain. He remembered dully

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that each supercharger was piped over so it could supply air for the other turbines in case of failure anywhere . . . He waited, very tired . . .

It was utterly dark outside. Somewhere below, the jagged peaks of the Andes stabbed upward for the fugitive air-cruisers of a conquered nation. In the radio-room, Sparks pounded out the fleet-call as steadily as oxygen-starved muscles would permit him. Of the fleet of six ships which had gone into action, Sid's ship alone was near by. Number Five maintained this desperate height for direct range of signal. To use any wave-length in the GC band would be to betray its position, and he dared use only the polarized-wave transmitter, thought to be unknown to the New Asians, but whose signals are not reflected either by the Heaviside Layer or by earth.

Ten hours after joining battle, Pete knew that his own ship and Sid's had gotten clear. Seven was somewhere over Ecuador with the Kin Lung's fliers still worrying at it tenaciously. They were the smallest, fastest planes of the Kin Lung's fleet, however, and obviously did not carry the Purple Gas. Nine had answered the fleet-call once from above eastern Brazil and thereafter did not reply at all. In that one report she announced trouble with her after lift-generator—the same that had given trouble when the ships first went aloft. Pete now wearily counted her lost.

IT was the Purple Gas, of course, which spoiled the air-battle for the Americans. The cruisers in open combat could give as good as they received. The gun-crews were unpracticed. Their fire-control systems practically did not exist. But together with their four-inch armor the cruisers mounted gun-power vastly greater than any wing-supported ships could carry. They could both take and deliver a pounding as severe as a sea battleship.

Pete's plans had been for a battle of guns and men. The Purple Gas seemed a bombardment, not a combat weapon. But as he smashed through the thickest of the Kin Lung's planes with his fleet, and turned to smash through again, the Purple Gas appeared in a monster, expanding globe. The New Asian planes dived through it with impunity, but Pete counted on his ships as the only hope of America. They were made of a steel alloy, ferridium, whose base was the same metal which had failed throughout all America when the Purple Gas made its appearance. He snapped orders. Fight, but dodge the Purple Gas. Destroy, but stay whole to keep on destroying.

The fleet swerved from that first great cloud, shattered a flight of bombers, and whirled as a perfect unit to continue the battle. Then the Purple Gas appeared on all sides. A great curtain of it sprang into being. Huge, expanding spheres darkened the horizon and shut off the earth. The fleet climbed swiftly—and a cloud of it burst into view directly overhead. Before Pete could bark the orders the battle-cruisers were separating to avoid it. And more masses of the stuff appeared, and more . . .

"Scatter!" said Pete levelly, into the General Order phone. "Get away from this damned gas. Rendezvous over the Andes east of Lima. But get away!"

He drove his own ship crashing into a twenty-man New Asian plant and felt the whole craft lift as the plane's cargo of bombs spilled and went off. Then there was ten minutes of pure nightmare. Dodging, darting, circling, whirling, fighting a rear-guard action for two ships—he did not know which ones they were—and then climbing for the blue when the whole New Asian force seemed to have separated into six swarms which each concentrated upon a single American ship.

Ten hours later, hanging twenty-five thousand feet up, Pete felt a vague surprise at the clearness with which he could remember the battle. For a long while past his brain had worked slowly and with infinite effort. He shook his head. The horrible lethargy that had possessed him was lighter now. He felt stronger. He looked at the inside-pressure barometer. Fifteen thousand feet. Pressure inside the ship was rising. The air was being pumped in by the great supercharger a little faster than it leaked out. Fourteen thousand. Twelve.

New energy filled him. He called Sid and relayed the artifice. Pump air in the

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ships with a supercharger on an idle but running motor. And climb! He sent his own ship up to thirty thousand feet. The inside pressure dropped again. The height could not be held. But at the peak of the swoop upward came a faint call from Three, just off the Panama coast over the Pacific, and the climb was worth while.

HOURS later, the dawn broke. Two slender metal needles reflected the sun's first rays, floating above the incredible peaks of the Andes. They were battered and war-torn. They were in nowise the trim fighting vessels which had gone into action the day before. But they were veterans, now. They waited for their consorts.

Seven joined up just after dawn. She brought twenty New Asian one-man fighters in her train. Her two sister-ships closed in savagely upon them—and one got back. The three remained stationary. Three was on the way, cutting the thin air at thirty thousand feet to join her companions. At six o'clock she was a bare three hundred miles away and still coming fast.

At six-ten, Nine reported from a thousand miles east. The after lift-generator had been giving trouble all night long. It still might go at any moment, but she was coming. At ten o'clock a slim shape slid into view from the northeast. Four! A one-pounder shell coming in a gun-port had smashed her transmitter so she could not report.

Ten minutes later the last of the fleet swept up into formation. Battered, smoke-blackened but still aloft, the cruiser-squadron was intact after a pitched battle with the Kin Lung's whole air force. More, it was the Purple Gas alone which had forced them to retreat. They had accounted for more than four times their whole personnel in battle, and almost their own tonnage of enemy ships. And that was triumph.

But it was a triumph curiously alloyed. Because the International Television broadcast came through as they headed west for the Pacific and lower altitudes. Pete's orders were for a landing on Juan Fernandez for inspection and redistribution of supplies. The news reader appeared on the screen with his usual sheaf of papers.

"The most interesting of all the news events of the past twenty-four hours," he droned, "is the mutiny of the former United States air-cruiser squadron. Surrendered to New Asia by the American government, its crews gave battle to the New Asian air fleet and it is believed have escaped. There are two official announcements concerning this. The records follow."

And then, rebroadcast from phonofilm, Pete Lomas and his men saw, first, a New Asian official who savagely declared them pirates, and warned the world that help given them would be considered an act of war against New Asia. Second, they saw the President of the United States. The President looked broken and old. His voice was very weary. He reiterated the New Asian warning, and bitterly repeated the order required of him, withdrawing from the fleet the right to fly the American flag. Defeat and humiliation showed in deep lines graven on his face.

The news reader reappeared, shuffling his sheaf of news items.

"Since those recorded announcements," he droned, "the Kin Lung has ordered the destruction of an American city for every additional day the pirate fleet displays the insignia of the United States as a battle-standard."

The fleet went on, ten thousand feet up, gleaming in the bright sunshine above the Pacific. Pete debated savagely. He looked out of a viewport and saw the American symbols on the sides of his ships. It was a wrench, but he pressed the General Order stud.

"Change course, due north, three-fifty miles per hour. Radio operators synchronize transmitters for power. Notice to all men of the fleet. You know what our enemies have done to our country and have just heard what they threaten if we fly our country's flag. For the sake of noncombatants at home, we have to cease its use. The flagship will transmit on united power, shortly, a notice to the New Asian government that we now sail under the skull and cross-bones. And hereafter this fleet is fighting for its flag as never before. We can fly it only after

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we have earned the right by knocking hell out of New Asia!"

He transmitted notice of the adoption of the pirate standard on a G. C. band, still headed north. Sid called on fleet communication ten minutes later.

"Pete!" he protested. "That's a hell of a note! My men are fighting mad! We've got to give 'em somebody to fight or they'll bite each other!"

"Good!" said Pete grimly. "They'll get their fill of it presently. I'm going to tell the New Asians again, while they still have their position-finders on us, just to give them a wrong course. Then we'll do our painting job and head for New Asia. I've an idea, Sid, that this war has been a bit too one-sided so far."

A SECOND time the transmitters of the fleet, in dead-beat synchrony, untied their power to proclaim to the world that they admitted their piratical status. Then the squadron swung to westward. It swooped to a landing on Juan Fernandez, almost as isolated then as when Alexander Selkirk lived on it to provide the material for "Robinson Crusoe."

The crew watched in sullen anger as painting-details covered over the star and circle of the United States and painted the skull and crossbones in their place on each flank of every ship. The only relieving note in that embittering ceremony was the fact that twelve inhabitants of the island, admiring the frankness of the symbol, volunteered for service in the ships.

Each of them naïvely claimed credit for many homicides as evidence of his fitness for piracy.

The fleet took off again. With many thousand miles before them, they practiced fleet-maneuvers on the way. At five thousand feet, Pete found his ships could hold a five-hundred-mile pace. At twenty thousand, six hundred and fifty was possible. And at twenty thousand feet every ship leaked air sufficiently for repair crews to locate the leaks and stop them. Before the shores of New Asia slid over the edge of the horizon, the six ships had climbed to eighty thousand feet and held it for a time.

And before New Asia drifted below, too, the cruisers confirmed their status as pirates. A Dutch oil-tanker surrendered to a two-inch shell across her bows, with her radio sputtering wild appeals to the heavens. In four hours the cruisers drained her tanks. And on the Sydney-Vancouver steamer-lane an Australian frozen-beef ship stopped her engines through the same persuasion. This skipper, though, cursed deeply at all New Asians and the Kin Lung in particular. Pete had to order him to report the piracy, or he'd have concealed it for their aid.

The air was full of code, now. High-pitched New Asian voices filled all the military wave-bands. Scramblers made the words gibberish, of course, but even on a scrambler voice-timbre shows up. Sparks on the flagship counted seventy-odd different voices on the air at the same time, and his directionals located as many sources. Pete called Sid on the fleet-phone.

"Our piracies have tipped them we're over on this side," he observed. "They've got watchers out all over creation. It's a wonder their screens don't register on us."

"Most excellent commander," said Sid dryly, "doesn't it occur to you that we're fifty thousand feet up right now? Above Mr. Heaviside's well-known layer? And that when you push an induction-screen up to that layer it howls? It's swell, Pete, that we've got air-tight ships. I hope our friends the enemy don't get onto the trick. We can hit 'em anywhere we like, and their screens won't show a damned thing until we're below the radio ceiling."

Pete considered. Then he said slowly:

"That looks promising. Sid, we'll try an air-lock transfer. Put your second in command of your ship and come on board. You'll take Five. If we can strike without giving warning, I'm going to try to get Danny out of prison-camp. Her uncle too. If they're worth holding because they know too much, they're worth rescuing because we don't know enough. And anyhow, if we do much damage they might be — shot as a reprisal."

Sid said distinctly:

"Like hell you're going to get Danny

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out of prison! I'm going to do that myself! Wait till I get over!"

HE cut the connection and swung his ship over the flagship. Days of maneuvering had made the ships like living things. Sid's ship, Three, touched lightly and seemed to cling. Upper and lower ports opened on the instant. Sid dived down, and they clanged shut again. Sid appeared in Five's control room, still gasping a little from that moment of near airlessness.

"My ship back in formation?" he demanded.

"Of course," said Pete. He pointed to the vision-plate, showing the other five cruisers in their monstrous V, moving at reduced speed of three hundred miles an hour over the mountains—which from aloft seemed anthills—of Hainan.

"Now listen, Sid! The chances are that Danny and your uncle were watched, in the first place, because Danny's engaged to me! Leaving discipline out of it, it's up to me to take the tender and do what I can."

"I've mutinied before," said Sid calmly. "For one thing, if I don't get a chance to bump off some of the Kin Lung's men soon I'll bite myself." Then the levity left his voice. "Pete," he said unsteadily, "I'm Danny's brother. We haven't been talking about her but—well—I've got the right to go! Besides, there's a little whistle-signal we used to have, as kids. If there's a rumpus going on and I give that signal, Danny'll know who's around. And she'll let me know where she is."

Pete drummed on the table before him.

"Dammit," he said bitterly, "the fleet needs you, Sid! But I'll map out a plan of campaign for it to follow if we're bumped off."

"Where are you going to hunt for her?"

"If we kidnap a reasonably important person," said Pete doggedly, "we'll find out. Third degree. If one doesn't know, another—"

Sid said urgently:

"There's a better bet than that, Pete! My uncle was working with Toyen Itso on some problems in spectroscopy. Toyen Itso's labs are government ones. Living quarters attached. They're housed in what used to be the governor's palace in Hwang-Chin. Northern edge of town."

"Right! We raid it," said Pete grimly. "If they're not there, then Toyen Itso ought to be a fair exchange for them."

He looked at maps, estimated, and pressed the general order stud.

"Cut speed to seventy miles. Course two hundred sixty degrees." He turned to Sid. "We can take five men in the tender. Get some volunteers. We'll be above Hwang-Chin an hour after dark. I'm going to get some tricks ready on the tender."

The six great ships slowed down and slowed down, moving in the vast emptiness of the upper spaces. Here at fifty thousand feet the sky was not altogether blue. It was a dirty slate color, cold and lifeless. With the sun still above the horizon, both Mars and Venus shone in daylight. Far, far below, little wisps of cloud fell behind as the ships moved on. But the earth was not visible to the naked eye in anything like a sharp pattern.

The Strait of Hainan showed as a broad space where Earth was paler. The Chinese coast, a little ahead and below, was merely an indefinite dark smudge, spreading up to the edge of the bowl which was the world below them. Mist in the lower atmosphere blurred all details and faded all colors.

THE ships moved ever more slowly. A long time later the night-shadow crept over the earth behind them. They could see darkness rising above the horizon to their rear. The sea blackened. Hainan lay deep in twilight while sunlight still shone on the earth directly beneath. The shadow flowed onward, swallowing up the misty ground. Presently the cruisers floated in glaring sunlight while night held sway below. They might appear as winking stars to peasants on the ground, but even that was hardly probable.

Then darkness, with the earth-shadow rising before them as a wall of black, A heater-dynamo hummed softly, somewhere in the ship. Even at this height in daylight, the ships absorbed as much or more heat from the sun as their flanks

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radiated away, and the icy air was too thin to have much cooling effect. But with darkness, bitter cold began.

Men moved about the small, queerly awkward shape of the tender in its tunnel. Pete gave his final orders.

"We're coming back," he told his second in command, "but if we don't, you do what damage you can, raise all the hell possible, and when you can't supply your ships any more, sink 'em where the water is a few miles deep. But meanwhile, get set to give Hwang-Chin a good two hundred tons of hexynitrate if our signal stops coming through."

Sid crowded through the small port of the tender. Five men showed gleaming eyes in the faint light within. Pete took the controls.

"O. K."

The tender lifted slightly. Men about it vanished. The outside-pressure barometer of the tender clicked suddenly. Its needle was fast against the pin at thirty thousand feet.

"We're floating free in the tunnel," said Pete in the blackness. "They've opened the exit-door. They'll speed up and leave us in the clear."

A faint glow appeared suddenly behind them and increased. Stars shone abruptly all about. Five, from a monster shape just before them, dwindled suddenly to a dot.

"We drop," said Pete curtly. "Hold on!"

Instantly all weight ceased. The tender fell like a plummet. The faint murmur of the balance-gyroscope was at first the only sound. Then a little hum began. It became a drone, and then a roar, and rose to a shriek—the wind of the tender's fall. Sid watched the outside-barometer needle, neglecting such internal sensations as falling always evokes. The needle stirred.

"Down to thirty — twenty-nine—twenty-seven. Pete, we're only twenty-two thousand feet up! Fifteen!"

"I know it," said Pete shortly. He cut in the lift-generator as he spoke and a sensation of crushing weight began. Twice, three times normal weight pulled and thrust at the men in the tender.

Sid watched the needle. It passed twelve; ten; nine . . . Eight . . . A reasonable interval passed before it touched seven. The shriek of the air past the tender dropped to a howl. At six thousand feet it was again a roar which lowered in pitch progressively. Four thousand feet. Three. Two . . .

PETE cut down the lift. The tender continued to drop, but slowly. He flicked over the sonic-altimeter switch. The two-wave note sped below them and came up again, too short in duration to affect any human ear, but giving them a direct reading of height from the earth's surface. Twelve hundred feet.

Pete brought the little ship to rest a bare fifty yards above the ground and switched in the outer microphones.

"The idea," he said dryly, "was that if they do have induction-screens out, our velocity of fall might make them think we were a shooting star. They haven't any ships they could pull out of a dive like that. Watch out detector."

If any man in charge of an induction-station were suspicious, he would strengthen his screens immediately and send out inductor-beams to try to locate the body that had registered. And Hwang-Chin was no more than a mile away. An air-raid alarm would sound on the outer microphones. But nothing sounded. Nothing showed on the detector.

"They've got lights on," said Sid savagely. "They think they're safe."

"They should be," said Pete. "We're inconsiderable, as far as they know. Sid, you might open a port. The rest of you get your guns ready. You know the job we have on hand. And everybody keep quiet."

Slowly, slowly, with the faint hum of the gyros as the only sound, the tender moved toward Hwang-Chin. Like a shadow the tiny craft crept forward. From the earth beneath them small sounds came up. The squeaking of a Chinese wheelbarrow, which is never oiled, and the clattering, tonal babbling of a group below. The grunting of pigs. The noise of the town itself grew gradually louder. Looking down, Pete could see the mud walls drifting ever closer. He saw figures wearing the *Tao* march-

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ing down a narrow street. Mere civilians scrambled out of the way. The mud wall reached up twenty feet, no more. The town emitted a continuous buzzing sound, as all Chinese towns do even now, but seemed placid and serene.

Smells came in the open port. Streets, and houses piled higgledy-piggledy passed beneath. Taller walls appeared ahead. The curious glow of Markham lamps shone beyond them. Pete headed the tender in that direction. They would be in Toyen Itso's laboratory, in the former governor's palace. The walls reached high. Barely fifty feet below the tender . . .

They heard the startled squawk of a sentry. Instantly a siren shrieked and a dozen searchlights blazed into brightness. The tender shone like white-hot metal in their glare. The tiny death's-heads on the flanks showed plainly. A rifle coughed and something smashed on the half-inch armor of the hull. More howls, and a machine gun opened up. Its tracer bullets glowed savagely as the gunner traversed it.

Then a two-inch anti-aircraft gun emitted its queerly silent flare of greenish flame, and the tender spun half over from the sheer impact of the shell. It sheered crazily away in a startled, side-slipping drop, and all the guns in the world seemed to open upon it.

CHAPTER V.

BATTLE OF HWANG-CHIN.

A BRICK wall loomed dead ahead and the tender smashed into it. It broke halfway through and stuck there, its bullet-proof ports star-streaked by fragments of masonry and tile. For a moment noise seemed to fill all creation. Guns going, shells exploding, the shrieking of the bomb-raid sirens throughout the town, and a furiously excited babbling and chattering audible even through the guns.

Then comparative silence. Masonry still tumbled down into a courtyard below. Whistles blew. Men shouted and ran toward the place of the crash.

"This is hell!" said Pete between his teeth. "Our signal?"

He glanced at the indicator. The light still glowed. The tiny polarized-wave transmitter still sent its signal straight aloft. The fleet, ten miles up, received it through the Heaviside Layer which no other signal would penetrate.

By Pete's orders, if that signal cut off, Hwang-Chin was to be bombed with two hundred tons of hexynitrate. It would blow the tender to fragments, and all the rest of the city with it. But the secret of the tender's lift would not be disclosed to New Asia.

"Brady!" snapped Pete. "You men stand by the ship here. The forward propulsion's jammed. Chances are you can't do a damned thing to fix it, but try. Use your guns, stand off the enemy as long as you can, and cut the signal when you can't do any more. Come on, Sid!"

He slung a belt about himself. Twenty small hexynitrate grenades clung to it. Sid was already struggling with the exit-port. He tumbled out, clutching a Thompson rifle. Pete followed.

"Lab first?" asked Sid in a savage calmness. "I've no hope at all, Pete. But let's do plenty of damage."

Pete was striding toward a doorway. Sid whistled shrilly. Somebody ran away. A Thompson rifle emitted its purring roar from the tender, half in and half out of the building wall. But for the gyros, holding it on an even keel, it would have tumbled out backward and crashed to the courtyard below. An outburst of howling somewhere. The men in the tender were shooting from the rear ports. A hexynitrate grenade went off with its incredibly sharp, racking concussion. A voice from the tender.

"Two of us'll hold this room while Brady works on the boat, sir!"

A man squirmed out into the room and tripped over a heap of débris. Sid was in the passage beyond, flinging up his rifle. He lowered it, swearing.

"A woman! Damn!"

"Come on!" snapped Pete.

Men pounded up a hidden flight of stairs. He ran toward them, saw the opening, and bowled a tiny grenade into its center. The noise that mingled with its explosion was not pretty. Two sentries, inevitably scared, stared affrightedly with their rifles at the ready. Pete

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swung up his Thompson gun as he ran, firing from the hip. He traversed the doorway. The sentries fired—and collapsed. A shriek came from beyond. Voices shouted.

THE two of them burst into the room beyond the door. It was a large room, a gigantic room. Once, perhaps, it had been a hall of state for a provincial governor, with room for his guards and hangers on and lesser officials, and for those who brought petitions and presents and bribes and the commands of long-forgotten Sons of Heaven. Now it was used for another purpose. Lights blazed overhead. Machinery stood here and there, and instruments and apparatus of exotic design, for unguessable purposes. But neither the instruments nor the blaze of light made Pete Lomas's teeth click savagely together.

A yellow man in laboratory apron was writhing on the floor—the man who had screamed as Pete's bullets passed through the sentries and the door. A short man with incredibly wide shoulders stood at a great arched opening, bellowing orders to some one beyond. And there was a white man in the room, a tall, elderly man in laboratory costume, with spectacles showing above a grayish beard. He was held fast against a wall by four *Tao*-marked men, while two others held bayonets against his breast.

Sid dropped on one knee.

"There's uncle," he said between his teeth. A head turned. The broad man by the arch screamed an order.

Sid held the trigger back. The purring roar of the gun sounded, curiously machinelike and altogether impersonal. The men with the bayonets made queer fumbling movements. Then the Thompson gun merely coughed, twice. Its bullets were tiny, hardly larger than the lead of an old-fashioned pencil, but their expansion on arrival made them deadly. Pete was halfway across the laboratory when the last of the soldiers crumpled to the floor. Racing for that broad man, Pete saw his expression alter. Fear— No. It was amazement and rage. He swung back to roar another order, and Pete shot him.

The tumult outside grew. All the forces of Hwang-Chin raced to the defense of the palace-laboratory, and there had been plenty of guards about it in the beginning. From where the tender hung precariously in a smashed-in wall, the sound of furious battle came. Thompson guns roared. Hexynitrate grenades went off with their distinctive sharp crash. Rumblings sounded as men poured up to fight.

The shrill whistle-signal of Sid Terrill sounded highly incongruous in the storm of sound. And a shaky reply seemed more improbable still. But it came, and Pete and Sid together faced the archway through which the broad-shouldered man had bellowed his commands. A trotting knot of uniformed men came through it, dragging Danny Terrill with them . . .

Pete tried to spare them. He barked an order for them to surrender. His gun threatened them, and Sid rested his Thompson rifle very carefully so that resistance was impossible. And of the six men, four did blanch and jerk their eyes skyward. But the other two—one of them, an officer, tugged at his pistol-holster. And the second lunged at Danny with his bayonet.

It was over in seconds. Sid was white as death, and his eyes burned.

"*You're all right, Danny?*" he asked evenly. "Our plans have been rather messed up. There's not much chance for us to get you away. But our intentions were good."

Danny stared at them, her hand at her throat. Pete said hoarsely:

"Pick up a gun, Danny. Professor?"

The tall, bearded man stooped and armed himself.

"I thought we were finished," he said unsteadily. "Toyen Itso—you killed him, Peter—was polite enough. I had to work with him, to ensure Danny's safety. But until the alarm came and guards seized men and went for Danny to—to kill us if—"

"We've got to fight back to the tender," said Pete harshly. "Talk later. Sid, guard our rear. Good Lord! What's that?"

The building swayed and seemed to settle. Glass crashed. Masonry fell.

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The unbearable single-wave concussion of a colossal hexynitrate bomb struck them like a blow.

"The fleet!" said Sid bitterly. "Bombing. The tender's taken!"

BUT the snarl of Thompson guns and the crash of grenades came through the seconds of awful silence between the explosion of the bomb and the howl of abject terror from the town.

"They cut the signal!" snapped Pete. "Come on before everything's blown to bits!"

A second tremendous crash. It was not a "boom!" like the bombs of earlier style. It was a single wave of sound, without pitch, without duration, but terrific in its effect.

Pete made for the door, his rifle ready. Sid shepherded the two others after him, pausing to toss a handful of grenades at random about the room. He did not wait to see the detonations wreck the apparatus about. He did see a rush of yellow men into the big room, but the grenades would take care of them.

Pete's gun rasped. A third giant bomb went off, some distance away. But a wall crumbled gently into powder, weakened by the two previous concussions. And then, quite suddenly, there was a howling as of inveterate hatred combined with despair, and yellow men poured into view, plunging at them from every side.

That fight was sheer confusion. Peter remembered swinging the Thompson gun as if it were a hose, holding back the trigger with one hand while he flung grenades with the other. Behind him, he heard Sid yelling in a high, hysterical frenzy as he fought.

Pete's gun went empty, the four hundred projectiles in its magazine exhausted. He flung it at his enemies. A common soldier's rifle went off over his shoulder, and the flame scorched his cheek. The whole building seemed to lift. Another bomb outside. Walls slid insanely. The floor buckled. Clouds of dust arose—and suddenly there were no more enemies. Sid came limping, with Danny supporting him. And Pete roared an order before him, and a light glared somewhere, and a white man with one side of his face laid open by a bullet appeared in that light and beckoned to them, and they ran.

The tender was hovering, quivering a little, some two feet above a crazy mass of smashed masonry. Nothing stood between it and the stars. A single searchlight glared at an angle toward the sky, and in its diffused light a small dark mass of men struggled toward the little ship. Small sparks of light showed among them—shots.

Vaguely, Pete could see their leader throw something, and the body of the tender rang and clattered from the débris of the New Asian grenade. A heavy fragment struck Pete on the shoulder and spun him around. But he wicked up Danny, fairly heaved her into the tender, and pounded savagely at Sid when he would have made Pete go first.

He tumbled inside.

"Send her up!" he snapped.

The tender went careening toward the sky, its exit-port flapping open, and a sudden rattling noise filled its interior. A last, still-served machine-gun fired despairingly as long as the tender was in sight.

"Everybody all right?" demanded Pete coldly. He secured the flapping port. "Danny? Professor? Sid? Any men lost?"

A voice said, muffled:

"Yeah. The Kin Lung lost some!"

Then laughter. Pete switched on the signal, calling the fleet furiously.

"Stop that bombing! We're all right! Coming up now!"

The fleet acknowledged. Somebody behind him said apologetically:

"Sorry, sir. It looked like you was gone. We cut the signal so we'd see the fireworks. He hadda stay, in case."

THREE more hexynitrate bombs fell in the town as the tender climbed. But these three bombs had been released before Pete ordered bombing stopped. Having nearly ten miles to fall, they took some time to reach their target.

Twenty thousand feet. Thirty. The air in the little ship grew thin because of the cracked ports. Pete took the controls and started the turbine. Going, he robbed the supercharger of air to main-

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tain pressure inside during the last wild dash up into the stratosphere. Then a flare. Light-signals from Five, and the monster cruiser swung smartly below them and lights glowed in the tender-port in its stern. The tiny, battered ship went quivering inside and to rest. And that was over.

New Asian planes could reach heights as great as the fleet's, though naturally they could not maintain a high concentration of the Purple Gas in air so thin as nearly to be a vacuum. But Pete considered that there were things more important, just then, than even fighting the Kin Lung's men.

He shifted position to consider them, and when the sun rose again it gleamed upon the fleet at sixty thousand feet above northern Korea. There were no military objectives to be destroyed below, and they would hardly be looked for here. As the sun rose strongly in a dark-purple sky in which the night-stars still shone fiercely, Pete held a council of war.

Danny was rested by that time. She smiled warmly at Pete as she came in to breakfast in the extraordinarily make-shift commander's cabin. Professor Anderson had borrowed an assortment of uniform clothing, which fitted very badly.

Pete looked at Sid, and Sid looked at Pete, and they grinned each at the other's appearance.

"With a bandanna handkerchief, Pete," said Sid critically, "you'll look like a pirate sure enough. You look worse than I do; I could get this way from being run through a meat-chopper."

Pete shrugged ruefully.

"I feel," he admitted, "as if I were nicely shredder up for breakfast food. Has Sparks picked up anything about our raid last night?"

"I was flirting with him," said Danny, smiling. "He told me that after the fleet moved away from over Hwang-Chin, Seven dropped down to thirty thousand feet and listened in."

"To get under the Heaviside Layer," explained Sid. "What did they get? I've been asleep."

"Nothing but code," said Danny. "He said the air went wild, but there was nothing to be made of it. One ship's down there now, relaying what it picks up by—by polarized waves?"

"Hm . . . Yes. We'll get the International broadcast presently." Pete glanced at a clock. "It's probably on now."

He reached over and turned on the vision-set in the wall. He went back to his breakfast as the screen lighted, divided into a myriad small frames. Sid picked the news-frame and enlarged it. The news-reader droned:

". . . fourth divorce for the famous television star. She will marry . . ."

Professor Anderson said mildly:

"Ah, now I know I am on earth again! A television star swaps husbands, and it's news of international importance! Decidedly I am on earth! I was beginning to doubt it."

He nodded at an open port, through which the new-risen sun could be seen as it swam in a dark-purple sky with the planet Mercury unobscured by daylight. The world below lay still in shadow, and only far, far away—many, many miles—did the morning sunlight reach earth's surface in a blaze of blue and gold. Previously, those who had seen such a sight were few indeed—airmen who had climbed to the stratosphere in electrically-heated suits, breathing oxygen from tanks.

"THE air-pirate squadron, formerly part of the United States air fleet," the news-reader droned again, "which had not been heard from since its looting of two ships in mid-Pacific, struck at New Asia last night. The city of Hwang-Chin was attacked and bombed. The purpose of the pirates was apparently the abduction of Miss Danaë Terrill and Professor Anderson, world-famous spectroscopist. Both are related to the former Lieutenant Sid Terrill, now understood to be second in command of the freebooting fleet. A casualty list running into the thousands is reported from Hwang-Chin, among the dead being Toyen Itso, famous physicist who is believed to be the inventor of the Purple Gas, New Asia's most dreaded weapon. The New Asian government has decreed the death penalty for any

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member of the pirate crews who may be captured, and has added a decreed death penalty for Miss Terrill and Professor Anderson, on the ground of escape from custody while in possession of military secrets."

The four at breakfast stared at each other.

"The same world!" commented Professor Anderson. "Quite mad! I know no military secrets! I was doing spectroscopy. We were using a diffraction-grating spectroscope, Peter, without a single lens or prism anywhere! A beautiful instrument! Working in perfectly dry air, with no water-vapor or CO_2, we found we could chart the hitherto blank area between fifty microns and three centimetres. Beautiful work, Peter! Beautiful!"

Pete said dryly: "Which would seem pure science, I have no doubt. And still it must have been important from a military standpoint. Suppose, sir, you go into details? Would it possibly throw any light on the Purple Gas?"

Professor Anderson supped meditatively at his coffee.

"Not unless the sciences have gone mad with the men who study them. You understand, Peter, we were charting the absorption-lines that have hitherto been unobservable. Langley went down to twenty microns with rock-salt prisms, before 1900. A bit later, some time in the 1920's or 30's, postassiumiodide crystals were grown large enough to be used for prisms. But until Toyen Itso invented this new spectroscope, the wave-lengths between fifty microns and three centimetres have been practically unknown!"*

"Your work does not seem," commented Pete dryly, "to have a military bearing."

"Of course not! And we were working on living tissue! Toyen Itso insisted that what we call life is a form of allotropy, that a living cell is merely an allotropic modification of a non-living cell. We were charting the absorption-spectra of nerve-cells—"

"Listen!" snapped Sid. He had given more than half his attention to the broadcast as the news-reader droned on. Now he held up his hand.

"IT is not yet certain," read the news-reader, "what action will be taken as to the status of Hawaii, which has not yet surrendered to the New Asian fleet. The Purple Gas has not yet been used against the island, perhaps because of prevailing high winds, and its garrison still holds out. Refusing to obey orders from Washington to surrender, the Hawaiians may be technically rebels. They have declared themselves belligerents, as the only part of the American Army still in the field against an enemy. It is reported that so far the New Asian fleet has lost one armored cruiser and several destroyers by shell-fire from the forts. The siege goes on."

Sid's eyes gleamed. Danny said joyfully:

"There are some fighting Americans left to help you, Pete!"

But Pete reached for the order-phone.

"General order for the fleet. Hawaii is still fighting. Fleet formation. Full speed. Great circle course for Honolulu. Call Seven up to join formation and for higher speed. We'd better climb to sixty thousand.—Report."

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*In this age there is certainly no need to explain spectrum analysis. However, the special technic of infra-red investigation may not be familiar. In ordinary spectroscopy, either the light emitted by a radiating body, or the light absorbed by a solution or vapor of it is examined; in the first case by separating the emitted light into a "rainbow" or spectrum, and noting the separate wave-lengths or "colors" which together constitute its distinctive light, and in the second by a similar dispersion of the transmitted light and the noting of the wave-lengths or "colors" absorbed by it. In all cases the vapor or solution absorbs exactly the same wave-lengths which, when radiant, it emits. A familiar example will be the D absorption-line of sodium. Sodium vapor absorbs light of wave-length 5893. Sodium-vapor lamps, still used for special purposes, emit a yellow light which is of wave-length 5893 . . . In infra-red work, however, instead of a dispersion of emitted or transmited light, single wave-lengthts are used successively and absorption noted by change of temperature in the substance examined, or by absence of reflection. In picturing Professor Anderson's work it may be useful to remember that the earth's radiation from its internal heat is mostly—75 per cent—longer than twenty microns, and that the shortest radio-wave in use now are approximately 3.75 centimetres.

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An instant later the voice of the second in command of Five:

"Acknowledgements, sir, of orders for Honolulu."

A confused roaring came suddenly. "Check, Nine!" "Check, Three!" and all the rest cut through it. The second in command of the flag-ship—and by his voice he was grinning joyously—said happily:

"That roaring, sir, is the men. They're rather pleased."

The flagship tilted slightly. The gradual, steady pressure of accelleration began and increased. Out the view-ports, the other ships could be seen, climbing as they turned. And then Seven came streaking out of the mists below, shooting up with total disregard for the evils of sudden high accelleration.

The ships leveled out. Every fiber of the flagship responded to the humming murmur of the turbines. In a gigantic V formation they sped toward Hawaii, straining every nerve, letting loose every ounce of force they could employ, for the last mile of speed they could develop. Pete went on an inspection tour. Fuel supplies could be higher. Foodstuffs ample, but more could be used. Bombs, still plenty, but the magazines for gun-shells showed gaps. Even one fleet action takes a lot of shells.

The engine room officer was beaming at the big speedometer-dial. It showed seven hundred and forty-six miles an hour.

"And I think, sir, we could push her up a bit higher. We're only sixty thousand feet up. At eighty, now. . . ."

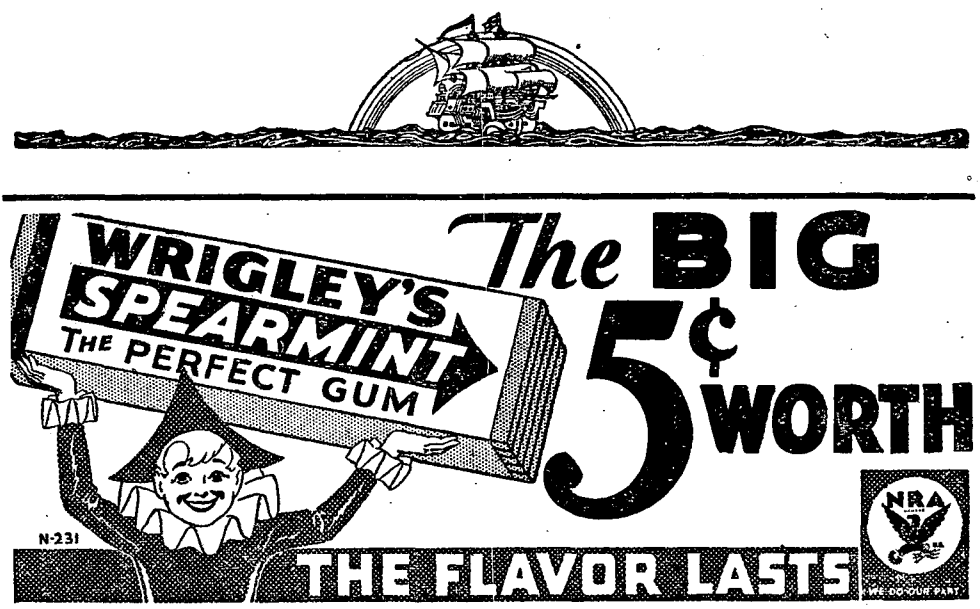
"I think we'll do," said Pete dryly.

"It'll be good to see somebody throwing shells at New Asians," said the officer. "I could use some spare parts, too."

"We'll all feel good," assented Pete. "I make it just about five hours more before we sight Honolulu. Then we ought to get in a scrap to give us an appetite for supper."

The fleet was in fine fettle. The ships raced on, quivering with eagerness. And that eagerness was fully justified when they came swooping down out of the clouds at their destination. They arrived without warning, unheralded, and they arrived in the middle of a determined assault by the combined sea-and-air fleet of the Kin Lung upon Honolulu. The six ships hurled themselves into action like living things gone mad with bloodlust.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



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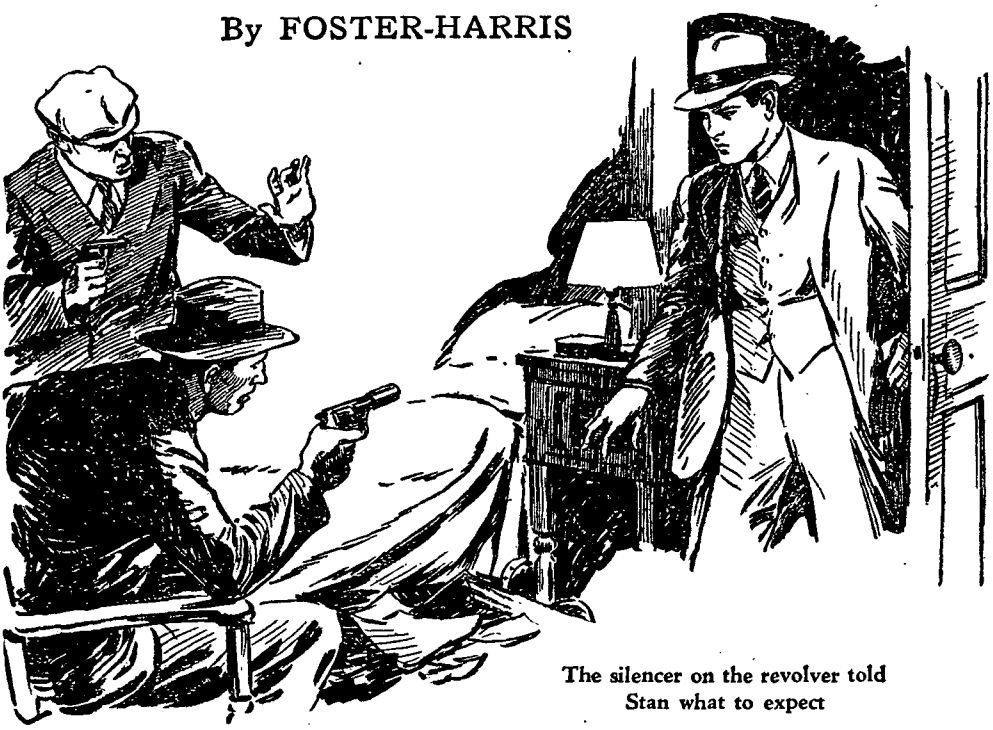
The Last Place

By FOSTER-HARRIS



The silencer on the revolver told Stan what to expect

"Hide that map in the last place any one would think of," Stan Martin, oilfield trouble shooter, was told

SOMETHING warned Stan Martin, red-headed trouble shooter for the Gulf Coast Exploration Corporation, even as he flung open his hotel room door, stepping hurriedly in and fumbling for the light.

The night plane for Houston and from there New York left in thirty minutes. He had just come up to get his grip, check out and catch it. Thus far nothing at all had happened, but—

The lights flashed on before his fingers could touch the switch. Instantly, Stan Martin started to leap back, to whip his hand up for the forty-five Colt snuggling under his left armpit. And as instantly he changed his mind.

He hadn't a chance, and he knew it. There were two of them, one sprawled in a rocker, the other flat against the wall beside the door. In the hand of the broken-nosed man in the rocker was a blue revolver with an odd, tubular device, a silencer, attached to the barrel, and it was trained straight at Martin's heart.

"Well, well, the tough baby himself!" the broken-nosed gunman grinned. "We was just waitin' for you, cookie. Suppose you stick your little paws up and come right on in. Shut the door, Buck."

Blue eyes narrowing, Stan Martin lifted his hands, slowly pushing his hat back off his forehead and advancing into the room. Behind him the door

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closed softly and he heard the rasp of the key turning in the lock.

The contents of his grip and briefcase were scattered all over the bed and the table. Even the grip itself had been ripped and slashed ruthlessly. Through the open windows on one side, far out, Stan Martin could see the faint, hazy shimmer of the moonlight on the waters of the Gulf, while the windows on the other side were catching some of the glow coming up from Corpus Christi's main street, seven stories below.

Martin edged toward the littered table beside those glow-lit windows, his freckled face creasing in an angry grin. Casually, he tossed his hat onto the table.

"You didn't need to cut up my Gladstone like that, you rats!" he snapped. "That bag was a present."

"You won't be needin' a grip any more, maybe," said the broken-nosed gunman harshly. "What'd you do with that map?"

Stan Martin's face expressed blank surprise. "What map?"

For the first time the big gorilla by the door took a hand in the conversation. Snarling menacingly, thumbing the hammer of the revolver in his club-like fist, he jerked forward.

"You know what he means, bozo! That seismograph map your outfit's been workin' on all summer. Hell, we know you got it! Old Jack Larsen give it to you to take up to New York personally, because he thinks you're such a boy wonder. We know all about it. Where is it?"

Stan Martin grinned derisively. They did seem to know an uncomfortable lot. Their brutal, merciless faces hinted plainly just how much conscientious reluctance they'd have about bumping him off. And no wonder! With a million dollars or so at stake—that map—

GEOPHYSICAL crews for the Gulf Coast Exploration Corporation had spent the whole spring and summer banging away to make that map, burning tons of dynamite, taking hundreds of seismograph readings of the tiny, earthquake-like pulsations sent through the earth by those explosions.

Infinitely patient, Chief Geologist Sumner had interpreted all those readings, put them together, performed a miracle of modern science—and revealed the locations of two new, gigantic, absolutely unknown salt domes, no inkling of whose existence appeared on the surface. Oil reservoirs hidden hundreds of feet under the earth.

What it all meant was that with this just completed map of those domes, Gulf Coast could stake and drill wells accordingly, with every prospect of developing two or more rich new oil pools. The map had cost more than a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, but it was worth it. Two deep, dry holes would have cost as much. With this map, those holes needn't be dry. They could be producers, gushers paying off millions in black gold.

But the trouble now was that Gulf Coast didn't have nearly all the land covering those domes securely under lease. Some of it was held by other companies, some was public land, there was a snarl in the New York office about a big deal to take over a huge and vital block. Bluff old Jack Larsen, field manager for Gulf Coast, had called Stan Martin into his office, in the big frame headquarters building, inside the high barbed fence in Palacios.

"Stan, this map's got to get to the

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New York office right away," Larsen had said, without preamble. "If they don't get it, or if the information leaks out on the way we just stand to lose enough money to pay the war debts."

Larsen chewed ferociously at his cigar. "There's a leak in our mail somewhere, I know that. And somebody, that damned Blanton Oil outfit I think, is after this thing and they're not stopping at anything to get it. Last night they busted in here, plugged old Frank Harper with a revolver with with a silencer on it when he caught 'em at the safe this was in. And if old Frank hadn't managed to shoot and yell when he fell—the damn skunks woulda killed him, gone right on and cracked the safe."

The big field manager clamped down angrily on the cigar. "Here. Here it is. I've had it photostated and reduced down so you can hide it in your shoe or something. Hide it the last place on earth you think they'll be liable to find it on you and beat it out of her, catch a plane at Corpus Christi and get to New York, hell for leather."

Nodding, Stan had taken the map, a sheet of fine, tough paper, no larger than an ordinary letterhead. A little thing to be worth, perhaps, millions! "I'll get it there," he promised quietly.

Old Jack Larsen grinned mirthlessly. "That's what I expect," he had snapped. "You're the fastest man with a gun in the Southwest, but they know that as well as I do. So you use your head and don't take any chances you don't have to. These rats won't hesitate a minute at murder."

REGRETFULLY, behind his derisive grin, Stan Martin was wishing now that he had paid more attention to old Larsen's warning. He had taken this hotel room as the best way to stay out of sight until the plane left, but he had been thoughtless to come back and let himself get caught like this. Now, unless he was extremely lucky, in a minute or two he was very likely to be ending up dead.

His poker face, however, betrayed nothing of the dismay in his mind. Grin widening, he stepped casually back another step toward the table and turned, facing the big gunman who had closed the door.

"Oh, that seismograph map!" He chuckled sardonically. "Why, you big saps, you don't think old Jack Larsen would be crazy enough to send just one man to take that all the way to New York, do you? Never thought about the mail, did you?"

A trace of uncertainty in his manner, the tall gunman, Buck, glanced at the broken-nosed killer in the rocker. Quite undisturbed, the broken-nosed gunman grunted.

"Aw, he's just lyin'. He's got it on him somewheres. Frisk him, Buck. Turn around and stand still, Martin, or—" He waved the revolver significantly.

Reluctantly, Stan Martin obeyed. Eyes narrowing, he debated his chances for whirling, closing with Buck, snatching his pistol from him and abandoned the idea. He might have handled Buck, but with Broken Nose over there he hadn't a chance.

"Yeah, sure I got that map on me!" he jeered, looking over his shoulder at the cautiously advancing Buck. "Big, ten-foot map and I got it all folded up and hid under my collar button. Try and find it, you dope!"

"We're goin' to," snarled Buck. His hand reached quickly for the gun under Martin's arm, snatching it out, tossing it over on the bed. "If you think we ain't, cookie, you just see."

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Bolder now that he had removed Stan Martin's weapon, Buck started methodically to search the red-headed trouble shooter from head to foot. Reaching over, Broken Nose picked up the revolver from the bed with his left hand, flicking the cylinder open, glancing carelessly at the leaden noses of the cartridges, snapping the gun back shut and dropping it in his lap.

"It don't seem to be on him nowheres, Rocky." Tiny, monkey eyes squinting perplexedly, Buck stepped back. "Hell, it must be pretty fair size, so—"

"Look in his shoes," the broken-nosed gunman snapped. "I'll bet you that's—wait a minute, though! His hat there! You didn't— Why, you— I'll kill you!"

With a sudden sweep of a long arm, Stan Martin had knocked his hat off the table and through the open window. The tall gunman, Buck, made a frantic, slightly foolish leap after it, saving himself from going out the window only by a desperate grab, swearing, leaning far out and looking down. Something hard jabbed savagely into the small of Stan's back and the maddened voice of the black-nosed gunman, Rocky, crackled in his ear.

"You dirty rat! I've a notion to blow your insides out, right now! So that's where you was hidin' it!"

"It's sailin' right down into the street, Rocky," wailed Buck plaintively. "It's—hell, a cop's pickin' it up!"

"Take your hat off and go right down there and git it!" Rocky jabbed the end of the silencer viciously into Stan Martin's spine. "I'll take care of this skunk till you git back. Just tell the damn cop it's your hat, blowed out the window. And you, Martin, damn you, go on, jump for the window and yell, now. Go on, make just one move!"

WITH a cold, clammy sensation up and down that backbone the silencer was caressing, Stan Martin realized that he was within a very tiny, baby's fingernail paring of death. He did not move. He heard the key turn in the lock and the door open. The jabbing pressure moved away from his back and looking slowly over his shoulder again, he saw that Rocky had stepped over to lock the door again, after the departing Buck. Rocky was facing him, his revolver leveled and ready in one hand, Stan's own gun in the other which turned the key. And the broken-nosed gunman's eyes were filmy, with that curious, deadly film you see in the eyes of a coiled, enraged rattlesnake.

"If you knew how close I come to killin' you when you knocked that hat out!" he said, in a snarling whisper. "All right, turn around! Jump at me, why don't you? Go on, jump!"

Stan Martin had obeyed the first command, but at the second invitation he only grinned. He wasn't ready to commit suicide, not yet! His wits were working like lightning. The first part of his plan had succeeded, he had only one man now to deal with. Have to work fast, though, before Buck could get back.

"How do you know that map's in that hat?" he drawled. "Maybe I just didn't want you rats to be cuttin' it up, like you did my grip there."

"It's in it, all right," growled the gunman. "If it ain't—well—" He jerked the revolver significantly.

Stan Martin let his eyes widen. "You wouldn't bump me off, would you! Old Flint Blanton paying you

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that much? He won't be sitting in the chair for you, though, big boy, when they cook you for it."

The gunman seemed to lose a little of his murderous irritation, finding instead derisive amusement. He sat down on the edge of the bed, still keeping Martin covered.

"Naw, we don't mean to rub you out unless we have to," he said. "When we git that map—Don't you worry about what Blanton's payin' us. It's enough."

"Oh." Stan Martin's eyes narrowed, just the smallest trifle. If he had needed any corroboration of what they intended to do, he had it now. This broken-nosed gorilla meant to kill him, the instant he was sure they had got the map.

Intentionally or not, probably not, the last thing the gunman had said had given the lie direct to his first statement. Dead men do not talk. If he had not been perfectly certain he was going to kill Martin within the next few minutes he certainly would not have admitted that Flint Blanton, head of Blanton Oil, was the man hiring him, the man after the map. And willing to hire murder done to get it. Gulf Coast Oil had flatly suspected Blanton for some time, but, until now, it never had had anything definite against him.

But now, if Martin lived—

Stan Martin took another look at the silencer on that revolver and nerved himself for a stab in the dark.

It was the second pistol silencer he had ever seen. From which he could reason that they were probably scarce as hen's teeth and this revolver, so equipped, might easily be the only one of the kind in this part of the country.

But the gunman who had shot Frank Harper, the old Gulf Coast Exploration watchman, over in the headquarters building in Palacios the other night, Jack Larsen had plainly said, had done so with a silenced revolver. It followed, almost beyond all doubt, that Rocky here must be the gunman. Though old Harper had not been killed, he had not gotten a good look at his assailant, but Rocky would hardly know that.

STAN MARTIN drew a quickly, relieved breath. "Well, it'd just be too bad for you, if you did kill me," he said, rather loudly. "They'll probably just give you five or ten years for shooting old Harper over in Palacios the other night, but if you put a bullet in me from that gun you might just as well cut your throat. Because—"

Rocky had jerked back, plainly startled, lips curling back over stained, broken teeth. "Whatta you mean, I shot somebody?" he snarled. "Why, they can't—"

Stan's chuckle interrupted. "Oh yes they can, tough guy. You think Gulf Coast hasn't got detectives after you right now? Why, old Harper got a good look at you and picked out your picture easy! Even if he hadn't they'd have traced you by that bullet you fired into him. Ever hear of ballistics, toughy?"

"You're talkin'!" the gunman sneered uneasily. "Why, hell—"

"Why, you dumb mug, even if old Harper hadn't got a good look at you, they'd have traced you! You with that silencer on your gat making it dead easy for 'em, too! If you're thinking of firin' a bullet into me—don't you know a silencer leaves its marks on a bullet, plain as day?"

Stan didn't know that, but Rocky obviously didn't either. Rocky leaned

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back, snarling and then, in one lightning movement, he did exactly what Stan wanted him to. He transferred Stan's revolver into his right hand, leveling it viciously, while in his left he held his own gun.

"Oh, yeah!" he spat. "Well, there ain't nothin' to prevent me pluggin' you with your own gat, cutie! Let's see 'em cut your own damn slug outa you and tell who done it with that! Come on, wise guy! Make a pass at me!"

Stan Martin's face fell. "The devil!" he said disconsolately. "Why, I—" Without warning, he flung himself forward in a savage, lightning dive.

Face split by a snarling grin, the broken-nosed killer lashed the big revolver forward and up, triggering furiously. There was the popping noise of exploding primers only. With a half scream, too late, clumsily he tried to bring the revolver in his left hand into play and Stan Martin was on him, a hundred and seventy-five pounds of plunging fury.

It was over so quick the appalled Rocky probably never had a clear idea just how it happened. Stan's flying right hand caught the wrist of that hand holding the thug's gun, giving it a furious twist outward and down. The gun coughed viciously, the bullet driving into the mattress. Simultaneously Martin's iron hard knee drove terrifically into the gangster's groin and his freckled, left fist hit him on the side of the jaw with the crack of Babe Ruth's bat meeting the ball.

Rocky was a good hombre before his back hit the bed. Just to make sure, Stan Martin ripped his own revolver out of the gunman's hand, let him have it over the head and then possessed himself of the bandit's gun.

Rocky was out, cold. Blue eyes sparkling triumphantly, red hair abristle, Stan Martin stepped back, swung hurriedly toward the door, gripping a gun in each hand, listening.

THE hotel was but scantily filled at this season and apparently the coughing bark of the silenced revolver and the noise of the fight had aroused no one on the floor. But, as he listened, down the hall he thought he heard the elevator door open and close.

Buck coming back, perhaps. Flat against the wall, Stan Martin waited, straining his ears.

Muffled footsteps outside, a cautious scratching on the door and then a low, guarded voice:

"Rocky? I got it, but— Lemme in."

"All right." Stan Martin tried hard to make his voice a perfect mimicry of Rocky's grunt. He unlocked the door, letting it swing open a foot. Buck's head came thrusting in and with a single, vicious, chopping blow, Stan Martin struck, the butt of his revolver hitting expertly just over the gunman's ear.

Buck sagged like a wet bedsheet, suddenly dropped off the line. Grinning, Stan caught him by the collar, dragging him inside. Swiftly he possessed himself of the limp gunman's revolver, then went over to the bed, rolling Rocky unceremoniously off, tearing the sheet into strips, setting swiftly to work.

Five minutes later he completed his work by tying his slashed grip together and walked over to pick up his hat from where Buck had dropped it. Chuckling, he glanced at the trussed, still unconscious gunmen, then slipped his revolver out of its shoulder holster,

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flicking open the cylinder, craning his head trying to look down the barrel.

"Hide it the last place on earth they'd expect, Larsen said," Stan Martin murmured. "Well, that is about the last place you'd think a gunman would. Good thing, though, I took the powder out of those shells."

Grinning, he tucked Buck's revolver into his belt, replacing his own weapon in its holster. It might be he would need a shootable gun somewhere on the rest of the trip, though he doubted it. His own gun was a good club and that was all—with that tightly folded map rammed and tamped into the barrel.

He walked over to the wall, lifted the receiver from the telephone and put it to his ear, glancing at his watch.

"Get me the police station, quick," he said. Then: "Sergeant Armstrong? Oh, hello, roughneck how yuh? This is Stan Martin. Huh? Say, listen now flatfoot, I've just got fifteen minutes to catch the night plane out at the airport and I'm gonna make it.

"Send some of your guys up to Room 707 in the Caballos Hotel and have 'em collect the two tough babies they'll find here. Hold 'em for shootin' that watchman and kickin' in our headquarters over at Palacios the other night and wire Joe Larsen. He'll have the details and I'll wire you, soon as I light. I'll leave a revolver they used at the desk for you.

"No, can't wait, I'm leavin' right now. Huh? Well not to the last place on earth you'd expect, Sarge, but here's one to Sherlock on. I am takin' the last place these babies expected with me."

THE END.

Fish that Fish for Fishermen

THE natives of Zanzibar Island off the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean modify the old adage "Set a thief to catch a thief" to "Harness a fish to catch a fish," by using the remoras or shark suckers, as they are commonly known, as lively fish hooks.

The remoras are sucking fish that seem to prefer company and have large sucking disks on their backs by which they so tightly fasten themselves to any moving object in the sea including sharks, whales, turtles, and many other kinds of sea life that their victims are unable to shake them off, and resign themselves to their parasite presence.

Zanzibar Island's inhabitants catch the sucker fish and convert them into real fishermen by fastening strong iron bands on their slender and tapering bodies just above the tails to which are attached movable rings. Lines are tied to these rings, given plenty of slack, and the fish sent out to fix themselves to their prey. By tracing the lines and drawing them in, the remoras with their captives are located and pulled to the surface, where with great difficulty they are made to release their forceful grips.

Clarence M. Fink.

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It was the first round in a personal feud

Color Blind

By CHARLES S. VERRAL

Author of "Dark Shadows," "Tough Going," etc.

Defenseman Jerry Palmer was skating into hockey oblivion because he wouldn't grandstand

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

GREASED SKIDS.

JERRY PALMER, veteran defense man of the New York Eskimos, never felt better in all of his thirty-five years. He finished his dinner, paid his check, and was going out the door when the manager of the restaurant looked up.

"How're you feeling, Mr. Palmer?" he asked.

"Fine," said Jerry, and pushed out into the night.

He walked up Eighth Avenue to Madison Square Garden.

As he turned along 49th Street, Jimmy, the newsboy, said, "'Night, Mr. Palmer. How're you feeling?"

"I'm fine, Jimmy, thanks."

Jerry went in the side entrance to the Garden. The doorman put down a newspaper.

"Evenin', Mr. Palmer. How're you feelin'?"

"Okay—I'm okay."

He swung down the corridor to the dressing room, whistling, paused be-

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fore the door, and pushed inward. In the middle of the room, and facing the door, stood Dave Turner. The stubby trainer's leathery face was solemn. He stood solidly with his small feet spread apart, his hands behind his back and his little black eyes on Jerry.

"Hi, Dave!" Jerry stepped inside and closed the door. "Guess I'm plenty early."

The trainer batted his eyes. "Hello, Jerry. How're you feeling?"

Jerry's face went grim. "For the love of Allah! What goes on? You're the twentieth person to ask me how I'm feeling.—I feel swell, perfectly swell. Get it?"

"Swell, perfectly swell," Dave repeated. "Then I guess you haven't seen it?"

"What?—Seen what?"

The trainer shook his head. "I knew it! I knew it when I heard you whistling. No man could 'a' seen that and whistled like ..."

"What's wrong?"

Dave moved his hands into view from behind his back. In the right fist was clenched a rolled-up edition of the *Evening Star*. He handed it to Jerry without comment.

The veteran's blue eyes were clouded and anxious as they flicked from the trainer's set face to the newspaper. He spread it open. The paper had been turned back to the sports section, and near the top of the sheet he saw his own picture. Alongside it was a photograph of a sleek-haired lad. Across the top of the two pictures was a line of bold type that fairly burned into his brain:

PALMER TRADE RUMORED.

Below his picture was printed:

Jerry Palmer, veteran defense man of the world champion New York Eskimos.

Under the other picture was:

Ace Jones, brilliant young defense man of the Detroit Greyhounds.

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And in smaller type beneath both halftones was:

Before the season is much older, the New York Eskimos and the Detroit Greyhounds may be swapping defense players. Although there is no official word, the dope has it that the Eskimos' new and enterprising pilot, Ben Allen, will release the veteran Palmer for the colorful youngster, Ace Jones. The trade would be revolutionary. Jerry Palmer is a name synonymous with that of the Eskimos. At the inception of the Eskimo Hockey Club, seven years ago, he was the first player signed by Major Rogers, and he has been playing right defense ever since. The rumored trade is seen as the first move on Manager Allen's part to rejuvenate the world champions.

It will be recalled that the youngster, Jones, although he has been in Greyhound uniform most of the season, is still the property of the New York club, and only on loan from the Eskimos' farm to fill the gap left by the sudden death of a Detroit defense man last November. The flashy youth has come far, since traveling in big company, and he has surprised his owners. Whether Jones, if given the chance, could fill the position the experienced Jerry Palmer has held down so expertly for years is the question.

Detroit is playing a regular scheduled fixture with the Eskimos to-morrow night at the Garden. The local moguls will undoubtedly be watching and comparing the two defense men. And it should make interesting watching for all and sundry . . .

THE color slowly drained from Jerry's face. His entire body seemed shaken and numbed. Beads of moisture dotted his forehead. Like a punch-drunk fighter, he stumbled across to a bench and sat down. His own team—his own Eskimos—selling him up the river. His brain twirled the thought round and round. Blood pounded in his ears. He was through—definitely through. The skids were greased and waiting.

The account was termed unofficial, and yet he knew that it was but the handwriting on the wall. He should have realized that this was in the wind. Whether it had been due to his conceit or his supreme self-confidence, he had never considered himself a victim for the new manager Allen's clean-up. He felt almost an essential part of the Eskimo hockey squad. For seven years he had seen players come and go; flash across the hockey horizon for two or three years and then peter out . . . And yet he had always remained, fighting with loyal intensity to gain and retain the Stanley Cup for his team. It had been his very life. And now to make way for new blood—fresh talent—an old-timer must take it on the chin. They were making it as painless as possible. From one major club to another and then—he'd be through.

Dimly, through the welter of his own spinning, churning thoughts, he heard Dave speaking. The voice sounded miles away.

"It's only a rumor, Jerry."

The paper slipped to the floor from the veteran's relaxed fingers. He stared vacantly across the room.

"Why, I—I'm not old . . ."

Dave wiped his hands nervously against his thighs. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"I'm not old.—Thirty-five." Jerry's face was pale; his lips seemed stiff and worked mechanically as he formed the words. "Why—why, I got years of hockey yet."

The trainer cleared his throat noisily. "They'd be crazy to trade you for a twenty-year-old kid, Jerry."

Jerry removed his hat, placed it on the bench beside him and ran his fingers through his hair. Color was gradually seeping back into his cheeks.

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"You know, Dave, if I leave the old Eskimos, I think I'll be through. Oh, I'll keep on playing—have to—but, hell! It sounds sappy and all that, but—I love this old outfit. For seven years it's been my life . . ."

"They'd be crazy to trade you," said Dave, dully.

Jerry looked up at him. "Crazy? —I don't know. I'm an old warhorse. The kid, Ace Jones, has youth and color. That's what Allen wants—color."

DAVE snorted. "Color! Grandstanding, is all."

"I should have seen this coming," Jerry said. "I should have guessed it."

"You'll have to snap out of it, Jerry," said Dave. "It isn't set yet. You're just throwing up your hands. You got a fighting chance. That's why I wanted to tell you so you'd play good against Montreal to-night. And then, to-morrow night you can go out and make a monkey out of Ace. You know that—that every fella on the team will be pulling for you, Jerry. You know that."

"Well, yeah—I—I suppose so," said Jerry, quietly.

His eyes were thoughtful as they looked at the trainer. Perhaps the man was right. The news had been such a shock that he hadn't thought about the possibility that there was the faintest hope of remaining with the Eskimos. Perhaps he did have a fighting chance.

"I hear that Ace Jones has come down ahead of the team to watch you play to-night," Dave said.

Jerry frowned. "What's the idea? We've played against each other three or four times this season. He knows how I play."

"I guess he wants to watch you from the side lines. Ace wants your job pretty bad."

The veteran straightened up. His eyes were thin and bright.

"If he gets my job, by Judas, he'll have earned it!"

"That's the old—"

The door of the dressing room banged open, and three members of the Eskimos came in. From the very expressions on their faces as they greeted him, Jerry knew that each man had read the article in the *Star* and felt confused and embarrassed in his presence. And as the rest of the team straggled in, the impression was more pronounced.

The subject was studiously avoided. If the news had been official, it would have been different. Trades are nothing new in the lives of professional hockey players. But the write-up had only hinted at the truth. Every one of his team mates felt sorry for him. Once an old-timer starts to slide, the descent is rapid.

Jerry donned his uniform methodically. Perhaps he *was* too old; perhaps his effectiveness on the defense had been slipping so gradually that he hadn't realized it himself; perhaps he was unconsciously trying to get by on his long record of past successful years in the hockey world.

His tortured mind revolved the situation over and over. That very night, the Eskimos were to play the Montreal Bears; and then, on the following night, contrary to the usual schedule, the Detroit Greyhounds and Ace Jones. The problem was immediate. Two games in two nights without a layoff in between. In the first encounter he'd have to be good, but the battle with the Greyhounds would be the show-down. It would decide.

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whether he remained a member of the world champion Eskimos, or began the slide to hockey oblivion. Jerry Palmer, veteran strategist — vs. — Ace Jones, scintillating, colorful youngster.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST LOSS.

A FEW minutes before playing time, Ben Allen, the manager of the Eskimos, came bustling into the dressing room. His small, slight figure looked dapper and meticulous in a well-pressed blue suit, a derby hat. But the manager's forehead was furrowed, his eyes preoccupied as he walked across the floor directly toward where Jerry was sitting. His eyes suddenly started as they met the veteran's steady gaze; his face colored, and he veered off abruptly to the left.

Jerry got to his feet and moved after him, his skates clumping noisily.

"Could I speak to you a second, Mr. Allen?" he said quietly, when he came up to the manager.

Allen turned, a look of mild surprise on his round, pudgy face. "Ah, Palmer. You want to see me?"

Jerry's voice sank lower. "Did you see the account in the *Star* to-night?"

The manager looked steadily at the insignia on Jerry's sweater.

"Why, no.—No—I didn't."

"You didn't see it?" Jerry's eyes narrowed.

"No.—Now, if you'll excuse me, I must see Turner about—" His voice trailed away as he turned on his heel and hurried off.

"You didn't see it, eh?" Jerry said softly to the manager's back.

He felt the eyes of every one in the room upon him as he went back to the bench beside his locker and sat down. If the report of the impending trade was true, why couldn't Allen have the courage to tell the truth about it? It had been obvious from his actions that he had *read* the account, despite his denial. A surge of intense bitterness swept through Jerry. After giving the best of his hockey years to one team, he was being treated like a damned rookie.

Allen looked at his watch. He went to the door and threw it open.

"All right, boys," he called. "Time! Let's go."

Jerry got to his feet and filed out with the rest of the team down the passageway to the ice. His face was grim as he stepped through the gate in the boards.

The giant Garden bowl was well filled, and a thunderous burst of cheering greeted the Eskimos as they deployed out on the ice. The Montreal Bears were already conducting their warming-up exercises in the other end of the rink.

The Eskimo goalie glided into position in front of his cage as the New York squad swirled in front of him. Jerry took a pass from a team mate, and drilled a vicious ankle shot at the twine. The goalie deflected the whistling puck into the boards, and Jerry, following in on his shot, took the rebounding rubber on his stick and passed it carelessly back to the other players.

THE referee blew his whistle from center ice. The substitutes skated off. The Eskimos lined up in battle formation as Jerry swirled into his position at right defense. He stood firmly on his skates; his lean, muscular body straight as an arrow; his right gauntleted hand gripped the butt end of his heavy stick, the blade resting on the ice in front of him. He

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shot a long, sweeping glance along one side of the giant bowl, and his eyes settled momentarily on the private box of Major Rogers, the president of the Eskimos. The distance was too great to recognize faces, but he knew that his every play would be closely watched by the occupants of that box. There was no place for errors or signs of weariness. His game had to be practically flawless. And—somewhere in the vast cyclorama of blurred white faces was Ace Jones, the Detroit defense man; the youth who wanted his job!

The band at the end of the Garden blared out the two national anthems; noise redoubled in the galleries. And then, with a shrill blast of his whistle, the referee dropped the puck between the crossed sticks of the center players, and the game was on!

Jerry tensed forward, his eyes narrowed. The Eskimo center shared the puck, pivoted and slapped a pass over to the right wing. The wingman took it on the run; was checked hard into the boards by a slashing Bear forward. The whistle blew. Again the disk went into play. The action was ragged and uncertain, concentrated near center ice. Both forward lines were finding difficulty in getting started. An Eskimo wing darted through on a wild solo effort, and launched a long floating shot at the Bear goal, from well outside the defense. It was yards wide of the mark. Twice, the official whistle blasted for off-sides.

Then the Montreal aggregation seemed suddenly to find its stride. Three man power attacks swept through the back-checking Eskimo forwards, to hurl themselves in on Jerry and his teammate Curry on the New York defense. Both men worked smoothly as they stepped into the flying Montrealers, to nail the puck carrier before he could pass or get his shot away. Jerry felt cool and confident, with his worries for the time being pigeonholed. His heavy body-checking was slowing up the enemy forwards perceptibly. Twice he made flashing, hurtling rushes up the ice, only to have the Bear goalie block his bullet like drives.

The Montrealers' spurt of action faded as the Eskimo forwards launched a desultory offensive. The crowd in the galleries began to stamp their feet in rhythm as a protest against the slow pace; and the period ended with both teams playing dismal, uninspiring hockey.

BACK in the dressing room, Jerry pulled the trainer out of earshot of the others.

"How'd I look, Dave?"

"You were okay.—But the others.—That was a lousy period to watch." He shrugged. "They all looked like sleeping sickness."

"Ha!"

Jerry sat down on a bench and stripped off his gloves. They were damp with perspiration.

Dave bent down and half whispered, "I seen Ace."

"I hope he got an eyeful," said Jerry coldly.

"He's got one with him."

"A dame, you mean?"

The trainer shook his head. "Molly Rogers." He stood up straight, put his hands on his hips and looked down at Jerry. "Yeah. I seen him with my own eyes."

"Molly Rogers!" Jerry exploded his breath.

"Can you tie that?—I bet her old man doesn't know."

Jerry frowned at the floor. Per-

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haps her old man *did* know. Perhaps he even approved. If that was the case, Jerry's chances of remaining with the Eskimos were slimmer than ever.

When professional hockey first came to New York, Major Rogers had organized and become president of the New York Eskimos. And his hands had held the reins ever since. At every game, during the first year or so, the major had been accompanied by his twelve-year-old daughter, Molly. The blue-eyed, curly-haired little brunette had become a great favorite with the team. Jerry, remaining constantly with the Eskimos, had watched her grow as the years passed, and even now he still regarded her as little more than a child with jet black curls and an impish gleam in her large eyes. Seven years ago—that made Molly nineteen now. The thought startled Jerry.

"You're sure about that, Dave?"

"Hell, yes! They're sitting close together, too."

"Uh-huh." Jerry gnawed his lower lip. Ace wasn't losing any time. He had come down to New York ahead of his team, not so much to watch Jerry play as to win the favor of the big shot's daughter. He was obviously determined to cinch a place on the Eskimos' line-up. But if their meeting was without the knowledge or consent of the Major.—Ace Jones was sticking his neck out for a heap of trouble. Major Rogers was a strict old disciplinarian, as far as players were concerned.

A FLOOD of resentment against the youthful star and his tactics swept through Jerry. Tales of the flashy youngster's escapades with show girls, of his frequent disregard of training rules, of his colossal egotism, had long made idle gossip around the circuit. Jerry scowled darkly. Molly was too young—too damn cute—too regular—to get mixed up with such a fellow.

"Maybe we should tip off the old man," Dave said.

Jerry snorted scornfully. "Yes. Wouldn't that sound swell, coming from me?"

The door slammed open, and Ben Allen barged into the room. His full-moon face was red; his eyes snapped. He didn't mince words.

"Of all the lousy performances I ever saw—that period was all of them! The fans come here to see real he-man hockey, not a bunch of dumb clucks skating around in little circles. I want flash—speed—color! You understand? Get out there and score goals! You can sleep later!"

He glared around the room, then turned on his heel and stalked out.

From a distant corner came the sound of a muffled "bird."

Some one laughed shortly.

"That guy oughta be producing the Follies."

"Maybe," said the goalie, "if we wore ballet costumes we'd have enough color."

The referee whistled shrilly from the corridor outside.

Jerry went moodily out with the rest, and skated slowly into position. The manager's sarcasm bit into him like acid. Every word seemed to be directed at him, personally. He wanted flash — speed — color! Ace Jones was noted for these characteristics. Jerry shrugged his wide shoulders. He knew he was being oversensitive. Allen had merely been prodding the team into producing good, fast hockey.

His prodding worked, too. The next two periods showed a direct reversal of form. Where the first had been slow

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and ragged, the second and third had terrific pace and clean-cut action. Right from the drop of the puck, the Eskimos leaped into high gear. The forwards flashed at a dizzy clip through the opposition, repeatedly to storm the Montreal goal. The Bear goalie rose to stellar heights as he turned aside almost certain scores, time after time. The Montreal team was fighting frantically, and was meeting speed with greater speed.

The second period passed with both teams trying desperately to break the scoreless deadlock. Fifteen minutes of the last period ticked away, and the score board still showed two zero marks. Both teams were exhausted. Substitutes shuttled from the benches in a steady procession to relieve the regulars. It was high-pressure hockey, of the caliber that transforms sober, sedate citizens into howling, frantic fans. The vast Garden echoed and re-echoed with the thunder of unleashed human voices.

Jerry and Curry, on the Eskimo defense, had played sensational, flawless hockey. Their perfect teamwork had created an impregnable stone wall that had brought disaster to the trickiest Bear combination attacks.

WITH but three minutes of playing time to go, a Montreal wingman came tearing down the right boards in a hurtling solo attempt. He shot from well outside the defense. The Eskimo goalie deftly caught the puck and passed it quickly out to Jerry. The veteran took the disk on his stick, whirled and started up the ice, his skates flashing like stabs of lightning as he gathered speed. A New York forward darted back to take his place on the right defense.

Jerry stick-handled dizzily through the savagely checking Montreal forward line, angled steeply to the left, cut back, and pounded straight for the crouched Bear defense men. The crowd was on its feet now, thundering. The veteran crossed the Bear blue line, faked a shot, whirled round the right defense man, and drilled a bullet-like drive at the tense Montreal net minder.

The goalie threw himself across the opening; barely in time, he managed to get his body in front of the blistering shot. The puck crashed into his chest protector and rebounded straight out, like a live thing. Jerry dived in, his stick outstretched in a desperate attempt to snare the ricocheting rubber—and missed.

A Bear forward swooped down on the black disk, took it on his stick, twirled and sped like an arrow straight down the full length of the ice. He played the boards past a checking New York forward, whirled around the player who was taking Jerry's place on the right defense, cut in toward the goal, and shot.

The Eskimo goalie hadn't a chance. The rifle-like drive streaked past him to smash hard into the upper right-hand corner of the net. The red light snapped on behind the goal. The Bears had scored!

Jerry, aghast, as he pounded down the ice, yards in the wake of the Montreal attacker, had watched the performance in detail. He had been helpless. If he hadn't made his unsuccessful rush, he would have been in his regular position on the defense. He might have checked the puck carrier and saved the goal. The forward who had taken his place had done his best, but he had been out of his element. Jerry skated back, his face grim, his eyes anguished. He was indirectly re-

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sponsible for that score. He ought never to have left his position on the defense. *Montreal Bears: 1 — New York Eskimos: 0.*

The puck was faced off at center ice, and the Bears hung desperately to their slim lead as the clock clicked off the handful of remaining seconds. The Eskimos, throwing four men forward in a wild, reckless gamble to tie the score, kept the Montrealers bottled up behind their own blue line.

It was a hectic, swirling scrimmage, with the Bears fighting tooth and nail and the fans shouting themselves hoarse.

And then, with a discordant clanging that seemed to stab into Jerry's brain, the gong burst into life. The game was over—and lost!

CHAPTER III.

F. O. B. DETROIT.

JERRY stripped off his wet uniform and went into the shower room. The hissing jets of cold water bit into his flesh and revived his tired body. He gazed dully at the white enameled temperature gauges. The Eskimos had lost the game by the narrowest of margins—but would they hold him responsible? At any other time it would have seemed of small consequence—just one of the breaks in the game. Whatever Major Rogers or the manager had thought of his performance, he had done his best. But the acid test, the real show-down, would come the following night in the game with the Detroit Greyhounds. The remaining years of his hockey career hinged on that game. And he would have one strike against him to start with—Ace Jones would be fresh, while he would be playing his second tough game in as many nights. The best thing to do, he realized, was to go immediately to his hotel and get a good night's sleep and forget what lay ahead.

After a brisk rubdown, Jerry dressed leisurely. He pulled on his overcoat, tugged his hat down over his eyes and went to the door.

Dave, the trainer, hurried over.

"You get a good sleep now, fella," he said. "You have to be good tomorrow night."

Jerry smiled. "You're telling me? —'Night, Dave."

He pulled open the door, stepped out into the passage, turned and bumped directly into some one.

"Well," said a nasal voice, "if it isn't old grandpaw!"

Jerry looked around quickly into the flushed, youthful face of Ace Jones. He was tall and slim, and his Chesterfield coat seemed molded to his well built figure. The coat was of an extreme Broadway cut, padded shoulders, fitting snugly at the hips. A light gray, almost white, fedora was pulled down at a rakish angle over his brown eyes. The blue serge trousers that showed below the Chesterfield were creased to razor-like edges, with wide cuffs flopped carelessly over immaculate pearl gray spats. The toes of his shoes were black mirrors.

"Hello, Ace," Jerry said. "Glad to see you."

"Yeah?" The younger man placed yellow, chamois-covered hands on his slim hips and teetered on his heels. A polished cane was caught over his forearm. His full lips smirked. "I hope you'll like the Greyhounds. The fellows are pretty much okay. You should make out."

"We'll see about that."

"It's practically decided now, uncle,"

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Ace said. "You're all washed up.—F. O. B. Detroit."

JERRY'S eyes were thin; his gaze level. The youngster was obviously a little drunk. His round, self-satisfied face was flushed, his eyes blood-shot, his breath redolent of alcohol. The veteran's feeling of disgust gave way to a cold anger that slowly welled within him. The Eskimos—the team he had helped mold into world beaters — the team that personified loyalty and sportsmanship — *his* team—was considering making this Ace Jones a regular on the squad. A player who openly and brazenly broke training in mid season.

Jerry's fingers clenched into hard fists. That Ace might supersede him on the defense, that he might be relegated to oblivion, didn't matter. It was impersonal. The team was the thing. It had become a definite part of his life. In the past seven years, he had evolved a stern and inflexible code. To become a member of the New York Eskimos meant more than being a superb hockey player. It meant unswerving loyalty, discipline and clean living. He had hoped that the unwritten precepts would continue long after he had retired from the game. But with the coming of the new manager, Allen, the old order had been quickly changed. Nothing mattered but sensationalism, news interest, color.

Jerry clamped his lips tightly and turned to leave.

"Wait a sec', Palmer," Ace said, grabbing his arm. "I was just trying to get a rise out of you.—What're you doing to-night?"

Jerry freed his arm. "What's it to you?"

"Now don't get sore!" Ace patted the air with a gloved hand. "I was just wondering if you'd like to go on a little party."

"No."

"I'll bet you're going home to bed. It must be hell to feel that you're getting old. You miss so much. I got a couple of girls outside."

Jerry hesitated. Was one of the girls Molly Rogers? She had been seen with him at the game.

Ace Jones, half drunk and with a reputation a mile long, wasn't exactly the companion for the pretty nineteen-year-old daughter of the club president.

"A couple of girls?"

Ace laughed. "Ha! The old mistero comes to life. Yes, a brace of perfect little honeys. And I'm cutting you in.—Say, you must know one of them—Molly Rogers."

"Sure."

Jerry's eyes were thoughtful. Molly Rogers! If the Major, her father, ever heard about this, there'd be hell to pay for both Molly and Ace.

"How'd you rate her?" he asked.

"Her old man and I," said Ace, crossing two fingers of his right hand, "are just like that."

Jerry made up his mind suddenly. He'd have to get Molly out of this before something happened.

"Okay," he said. "I'm with you."

Ace blinked. "Well, *am* I surprised?—They're outside in a cab."

They went down the passageway and through the exit to 49th Street. The taxicab was parked at the curb, halfway down the block. The light in the tonneau popped on when Ace opened the door. Jerry saw Molly Rogers sitting beside a curly-headed blonde of her own age.

Ace bowed and motioned with his hand.

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"Allow me to present our chaperon —Mr. Jerry Palmer."

JERRY thought he detected a fleeting shadow cross Molly's pretty face when she saw him, and then she was smiling as gayly as ever. She stretched out her hand.

"Hello, Jerry. I'm so glad you're coming along. This is Kay Wilson—Jerry Palmer."

The veteran murmured his acknowledgment; and climbing into the cab, sat down between the two girls.

"It's *the* Jerry Palmer?" the blonde asked.

Ace perched himself on a folding seat. "Of course," he said. "The grand old man of hockey, hisself!"

He pushed back the sliding glass partition and issued instructions to the driver in a low voice.

The cab jolted into motion, moving slowly through the heavy theater traffic. Both girls were vivacious and talkative; but to Jerry, Molly's gayety seemed forced and lacking in spontaneity. His mind was milling with unanswerable questions. Why had Ace asked him on this party? Was the flashy youngster leading him into a trap—into something that would nullify his chances of remaining with the Eskimos? Or was he simply going to use him as a butt for his jokes and grandstanding? Mentally, Jerry cursed himself for being such a fool. He shouldn't have come along. He had done so solely on Molly's account, even though she might resent his intervention. But before he could decide on any definite course, he'd have to have a talk with the girl alone.

The taxi ground to a stop in the east fifties, in front of a remodelled brownstone house with a gaudy electric sign.

"Here we are," said Ace.

He paid and dismissed the driver, and led the way down a half-dozen steps to the door. Jerry's mind was uneasy as he looked the place over. Ostensibly, the place was a night club, but it was really little better than one of those speakeasies of the days before repeal. And certainly it was no place for a professional hockey player to be seen, especially on the night before an important game.

But there was no backing out now.

When they entered, they were shown immediately to a table in a booth beside a dance floor the size of a postage stamp. The place was small, and dimly illuminated, with a bar running the full width of the room at the back. There weren't more than a dozen patrons in the whole establishment. Jerry looked them over carefully, as he sat down beside Molly. And then his whole body went rigid. Across the room, sipping a glass of beer, was Bill Williams, a sports reporter for the *Evening Star*.

"What's wrong?" Molly said, looking up.

"Nothing," said Jerry. "I just see some one I know."

Had Ace framed this? The veteran's fists clenched. Had he arranged for the reporter to be present here? Jerry shot an accusing glance at the Detroit player. But Ace was talking to the blonde, and apparently he was unaware of the incident.

Jerry got up.

"Will you excuse me a minute?" he asked Molly.

She nodded; her eyes looked worried. Jerry went directly across the room to where the reporter was seated. The latter saw the veteran, and his eyes widened.

"As I live and breathe—Jerry Palmer!"

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Jerry motioned with his hands. "For God's sake take it easy!" He slid into a chair at the table.

"What's the idea?"

"You don't know what this is all about?"

"Hell, no—I don't!"

Jerry leaned across the table. "You haven't seen me or any of those people over there."

The reporter frowned, and then a slow grin spread across his face.

"I get it. All right. I haven't seen you."

"That a promise? I'm serious as hell about this, Williams."

"Okay. I won't dish up any dirt. But I think you better get out of here pretty soon. A flock of newspaper men wander in, every once in a while."

Jerry passed a hand across his damp forehead.

"Thanks. We're getting out just as soon as possible, if I have anything to do with it."

HE got back to the booth just as Ace and the blonde were leaving for the dance floor.

Jerry sat down beside Molly. She placed a little gloved hand on his arm.

"Dad mustn't know a thing about this, Jerry," she said in a fervent whisper.

"I guessed that."

"I told Ace that you had asked me for this dance. I wanted to have a little talk with you.—I mean—Dad mustn't know." Her large blue eyes searched his. "You won't tell, will you?"

"No. Don't worry about that." He saw that the blonde and Ace had gone over to the bar instead of dancing. "But we have to get out of here as soon as possible."

"Why, we've only arrived!"

"If you don't want your dad to know all about this, we'd better leave. Don't you realize what the sport pages would do if they knew that Ace and I were seen together in a place like this—a 'hot spot'—on the night before a game? Especially with the daughter of the president of the Eskimos?"

"No one will see us, Jerry. You're just old fashioned."

"Perhaps. But that fellow I just spoke to happens to be a reporter. He's promised not to say anything, but others might."

"Oh." Molly looked suddenly worried. "Hadn't we better get Ace and tell him?"

"Let's wait till they come back." Jerry knew that if the proposition about leaving were to be put up to the other player at this time, the youth was probably just drunk enough to kick up a rumpus and attract a lot of undesirable attention. Taht was the one thing to avoid.

"You like him a lot?" he said, turning to Molly.

Color mounted into her cheeks and she looked down at the checkered table cloth.

"You mean Ace?"

She said the name with a caressing softness.

"Yes."

A little vermilion hat was pulled down over her blue-black hair. She tilted her head back. Her eyes were misty and sparkling; her soft lips slightly parted.

"I think he's an awfully nice boy," she said.

IN that moment she was radiantly beautiful. Jerry sighed inwardly.

A perfect little thoroughbred, head over heels in love with Ace Jones, of

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all people. He didn't attempt to reason it out. It was just one of those things. And perhaps he was prejudiced.

"Have you known him for long?" Jerry asked.

"A little over a month. But it seems as if I've known him forever. We understand each other. When he came to New York this time, he took a room right in the same hotel where Dad and I are living. It's thrilling. Kay has been staying with me for a couple of weeks, and so Ace asked us both to the game to-night. And then he went and got you for her. She's an awfully nice kid, Jerry. You'll like her."

"She seems nice."

He was racking his brains for the best way out of the fix into which he had deliberately stepped. The situation was delicate. He had come solely on Molly's account, only to find her infatuated with Ace Jones. Jerry cursed himself for a stupid lout. At that very minute, he should have been in his hotel room sleeping, instead of meddling in other people's business.

A waiter came up and unloaded cracked ice, glasses, four jiggers of rye and ginger ale on the table. He jerked his head.

"Gentleman at the bar ordered," he said.

CHAPTER IV.

IN A JAM.

THE door opened and two men came in. Jerry gave them a hasty, flashing survey. They were complete strangers, foreign looking and unsteady on their feet. As they lurched across the dance floor, headed for the bar, Jerry saw that Ace and the blonde were making their way back to the booth. The two men passed directly in front of the couple — and then it happened.

It seemed to Jerry that the taller one of the two strangers staggered uncertainly on the polished flooring and bumped into the blonde. He recovered his balance, and half bowed. But without a second's warning, Ace drew back his left fist and smashed it with terrific force into the man's face; hurled him back against his drunken companion. The two newcomers staggered across the dance floor like human ninepins, pawing wildly at the air, and piled up against a table. They went down with a vibrating crash, overturning the table and two chairs.

Jerry was on his feet instantly. Ace had let them in for it now, and no mistake. Kay ran over to the booth, her face white.

"Get your things on," said Jerry to Molly, "and be ready to leave."

The man who had received the blow lay where he had fallen, blood streaming from his nose. His short, stalky companion wriggled free, staggered to his feet, a stream of curses spluttering from his lips. Ace swaggered toward him. The man lunged drunkenly, his arms swinging. Ace side-stepped coolly, poised his right fist, and swung hard. He caught the man under the jaw, and fairly blasted him back to crash down against a table a few yards from his prone companion.

Jerry rushed over to Ace and grabbed him by the arm.

"You fool!" he said. "Come on—we've got to get out of here."

Ace jerked his arm free. "I'll get the—"

Out of the corner of his eye, Jerry suddenly caught the gleam of bluish steel. He whirled around. The stalky man was half up on the floor, and was jerking an automatic from his pocket.

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The veteran's heart thudded into his throat. The man's hand flashed up; leveled the gun straight at Ace.

JERRY seized the youth by the coat sleeve and literally threw him aside as the gun roared. The bullet whistled through the air where Ace had been standing, to thud into the ceiling. Some one in the room shouted hoarsely. Ace turned a frightened, blanched face toward Jerry, and dived under a table. The veteran ducked down to one side as the automatic once more erupted crimson flame. Seizing a chair, he hurled it with all his might at the gunman, and lunged in after it. The chair caught the man full across the chest, jolting his gun hand upward. Again the automatic thundered deafeningly; bullets spewed into the walls and ceiling; a mirror was reduced to tinkling fragments. Jerry felt something burn across his left arm — and then he was on the gunman.

He landed heavily; knocked the man flat on his back; found his wrist and savagely twisted the gun free. Throwing the weapon to one side, he smashed a fist against the man's jaw. And in that second he caught a glimpse of the fellow's companion groggily raising himself with one hand and pawing uncertainly at his coat pocket with the other.

Some one found the light switch. There was a crackle of blue flame— and the speakeasy was pitched into total darkness!

Instantly, every one in the place seemed to find his voice. Furniture crashed to the floor. There was the sound of moving bodies, of muffled oaths and running feet.

Jerry scrambled erect and backed away. His mind was cool. The police would arrive at any minute. . . .

He felt some one glide past him.

"Jerry!" said a man's voice.

"Yes."

"This is Williams." The newspaper man moved nearer. "This way, quick! I'll get you out."

"Wait till I get the rest."

Jerry groped toward the booth.

"Molly?" he whispered.

"Yes. We're here."

"Where's Ace?"

From the darkness to the right came the youth's shaky voice. "Here."

"Come on. Hurry up!" Jerry said.

Williams quickly led the four through a maze of tables to a small room in the rear. He tugged open a door, and they stepped out into a narrow alley. The light was dim. They hurried toward the street at the end.

"That's mighty white of you, Williams," Jerry said.

"That's okay. And don't worry about anything being printed." He jolted against the veteran's left arm. Jerry winced and grunted with pain.

"One of them get you?"

"Yes. Only a scratch, I think."

"That's tough."

They came out into the street. Williams hailed a cab.

"I'm leaving you," he said. "You'd better get out of here fast."

FROM the next block came the shrill scream of a racing police patrol car. The reporter headed rapidly down the street as the four climbed into the taxicab.

"Get going!" Jerry said to the driver.

The cab jolted forward, turned the corner and headed west.

"You both all right?" Jerry asked the girls.

"Yes," said Molly. "But your arm. —Did they shoot you in the arm?"

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"It's nothing."

Yet his whole arm seemed to be on fire.

Ace was huddled in a corner of the cab, his face white and shining.

"If you'd only left me alone," he said, weakly.

Molly looked at him. "If Jerry had left you alone, you'd be dead," she said quietly.

"You're staying at the Royal Hotel, aren't you, Molly?" asked Jerry.

"Yes."

He leaned forward and gave the driver the directions.

In ten minutes the cab stopped before the entrance. Jerry helped the two girls out.

"I'm sorry about this, Jerry," said Molly. She gripped his hand. "You were — were splendid. But your arm—"

"I'll get that fixed up. Now, nothing's to be said about this to any one."

"Heavens, no!—'Night!"

He watched them go in through the revolving doors.

"Aren't you staying here, Ace?"

The youth nodded and got slowly out of the cab. His eyes were furtive.

"You've only got yourself to thank for that." He pointed at Jerry's left arm. "You should have left me alone."

The veteran looked at him coldly. Turning then, he climbed back into the cab and gave the driver the address of his hotel.

When he got to his room he hastily pulled off his clothes. His shirt was soggy with blood. Strangely enough, the pain had left and the only sensation in his arm was one of numbness. He ripped off the shirt, went into the bathroom and washed the wound thoroughly. The bullet had bored a deep crease in his arm, near the shoulder. He stood frowning in indecision; then he went into the other room, picked up the phone and asked to be connected with Mr. Turner's room.

The clock on the table showed one-thirty.

"Dave," he said, when the trainer's sleepy voice sounded. "This is Jerry. Get your medical kit and come down here as fast as you can, if you expect me to be ready to play at eight-thirty to-morrow night!"

CHAPTER V.

FIRST PERIOD.

THE full squads of players were on the ice when Jerry stepped through the opening in the boards. It lacked a few minutes to eight-thirty. The veteran skated to where the Eskimos were warming up. Some one shoved the puck over to him. He took it, skated three strides, and launched a slow shot at the net. The goalie blocked it and banged the puck out. Three players took practice drives before Jerry could get his stick on the rubber again. He tensed his wrists and drilled a hard, low shot. The puck crashed against the goalie's leg pads, and rebounded straight out. Jerry followed in on his shot, picked up the rubber and lifted another drive. It streaked under the goal keeper's right arm to bulge the netting.

The veteran skated back toward the bench. He leaned across the boards and spoke to the Eskimo trainer.

"It hurts a little when I shoot, but it's okay.—Thanks to you!"

"The game hasn't started yet," said Dave. "That shoulder protector should help; but if you start stopping guys with that bum wing, you're going to feel it."

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"I'll make out. Don't worry."

The trainer shook his head. "You would pick this time to get shot."

"It was almost worth it, seeing Ace dive under that table. He's been avoiding me like the plague ever since. I think I got the kid's number."

"You'll be wearing his number on the back of a Greyhound sweater, if you aren't careful," Dave said.

Jerry's eyes rested momentarily on Major Rogers's private box in the first tier, directly behind the bench. The president of the Eskimos was talking earnestly to Allen, the manager. And as he watched, Jerry saw Molly and her friend, Kay, being ushered in.

"I'll win out. I've *got* to, Dave. It'd mean my finish, to leave the Eskimos." He made a wry face. "It's a damn good thing that slug didn't go any deeper!"

A white-jerseyed referee slid to a stop at center ice and blew his whistle.

Jerry skated back to his position on the right defense, his heart beating faster. The substitutes scurried past him. He circled to a stop, his skates shooting little fountains of scraped ice into the air. The big test was squarely before him. Far down the ice on the Detroit defense, he saw Ace Jones. The events of the previous night undoubtedly rankled in the youth's breast. It would be a bitter duel, with no quarter given or asked. Sixty minutes of playing time would decide it.

The referee blew his whistle again, looked quickly to right and left. The puck dropped between the two centers; the Garden boomed with thunder—and they were off!

BOTH teams stepped into fast, aggressive action. The Greyhound center took the puck at the face-off, whipped a pass toward his right wing. An Eskimo forward broke away fast, literally threw himself up the ice, stick extended, and intercepted the pass. The Detroit forward line was caught flat-footed, and the New York puck carrier was well past center ice and racing for the Greyhound defense before they could act. The Eskimo crossed the blue line, swerved to the right, darted around Ace Jones, and shot. The Detroit goalie barely managed to get his stick in front of the smoking drive. He batted the disk quickly into the boards at the side of the rink.

Ace sprinted forward as the crowd shouted.

He took the puck on his stick and pounded down the right boards, his speed increasing with every stroke of his powerful legs.

Jerry stood firmly on his skates, his lips clamped tightly together, his eyes fixed on the advancing Greyhound youngster. And in spite of himself, his heart beat faster and his hands, inside his gauntlets, were suddenly damp. Instead of passing to one of his forwards, Ace had deserted his defense position to carry the puck on a wild charge down the ice. It was the opening move in the duel.

Jerry tensed forward. The wound in his arm throbbed dully. Would he be able to check the oncoming cyclonic rush?

With brilliant ease, Ace stickhandled past two savagely back-checking Eskimo forwards, cut across the ice, reversed and swept down the right alley. It was pretty, colorful work. A Detroit wingman was tearing along the left boards in a perfect position for a pass. Curry, on the left defense, moved over to cover him.

The Garden was filled with noise as the rangy Detroit youngster spun

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across the blue line. Jerry braced himself. Ace changed direction, swirled at right angles, and then, without warning, twisted and plunged straight between the two Eskimo defense men. Jerry lowered his wounded left shoulder and lunged. He caught the flying youth just under the arm pit. A second later, Curry charged in to take him on the other side. Ace was sandwiched expertly between them. He tottered, stumbled, and fell heavily to the ice as Jerry and Curry broke apart.

The puck rolled from the stick of the fallen man toward the New York net. The goalie came out hurriedly, and knocked it forward to Jerry. The veteran took the disk on his stick, whirled, and digging in his skates, plunged up the ice.

His teeth were sunk into his lower lip to stifle the pain. A red-hot dagger seemed to be stabbing with excruciating regularity through his arm. "You start stopping guys with that bum wing, and you're going to feel it," Dave had warned. Jerry was feeling it—but Ace had been stopped dead.

He hugged the right boards as he raced up the ice, angled steeply across center ice, cut back again, to leave a slashing Greyhound stranded and jerked up his head in a quick glance across the rink.

THE Eskimo left wing was traveling a hurtling course parallel to his. His eyes were on the big defense man.

Jerry raced for the blue line, crossed it and headed straight for the player who was filling Ace's place on the defense. The man came slowly out to meet him. The veteran feigned a shot, and passed quickly to his left. The puck streaked across the ice in a perfect line for the wingman's stick. The Eskimo took it at top speed, careened to the right, and swept directly in front of the two defense men. Jerry angled steeply to the left, crisscrossed behind the puck carrier. The Greyhound defense was bewildered by the move and split apart, each man moving to cover one of the two attackers.

The Eskimo forward swept in; and then, contracting his wrists, blasted a snap shot. The Detroit goalie threw himself across the six-foot opening. The puck streaked with the speed of a bullet, whistled past his arm, shaved the left goal post on the inside, and thudded into the twine.

The red light snapped on behind the goal. The New York Eskimos had scored!

The Garden fairly trembled as the stands erupted thunder.

Jerry skated back, caught a glimpse of Ace returning to his position. The youth's face was flushed and his eyes glittered. The Eskimo players swarmed around Jerry and the sharpshooting forward. The veteran felt a warm glow in the pit of his stomach. Every one of his team mates was pulling hard for him to win out against his youthful rival.

He swirled back into his position, his eyes bright. The gods of luck had played right into his hand. Not only had he been able to dam Ace's sensational rush, but he had capitalized upon it.

He had won the first round in the private feud, but the battle had only begun.

Pain gnawed in his left arm, and he realized with alarm that any further aggravation to the wound might put him definitely out of the game. In that event, he would be leaving the field unchallenged to Ace. And under

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no condition would he do that. They'd have to carry him off first.

THE puck was faced off at center ice; and the New Yorkers, instead of defending their slim advantage, carried the fight to the enemy. The Greyhounds, temporarily disorganized, fought back savagely as the Eskimos' forward line repeatedly stormed their defending zone. Only the superb defense work of Ace Jones, coupled with uncanny goal tending, prevented the Eskimos from adding to their single score.

The youthful Detroit defense man was sensational, as he repeatedly stepped into three-man power attacks to stop the puck carrier in his tracks. Jerry watched from the other end of the ice. The kid was good; there was no getting away from it.

The Greyhound players who managed infrequently to streak through the close-checking forwards in wild scoring attempts, found Curry and Jerry ready and waiting. The teamwork of the two New York defense men was smooth and disastrous to the attackers. The veteran favored his left shoulder in body-checking his opponents.

The time clock moved steadily onward. The intensity of the Eskimo offensive diminished, and the puck shuttled from Detroit territory to New York with both teams shooting from far out.

Jerry remained in his defense position, and did not venture up the ice. The Eskimos had a one-goal lead over their rivals, and his job was to protect that advantage. The forwards would add to it if they were able.

Three times, Ace Jones took the puck behind his own blue line; and three times he was checked to a standstill before he had raced beyond center ice. He was making a fourth whirlwind attack when the gong sounded. The first period was over. *New York Eskimos: 1—Detroit Greyhounds: 0.*

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITOR.

BACK in the dressing room, Jerry lolled back on a bench, his body relaxed, his eyes closed. The persistent pain in his right arm was beginning to wear his nerves ragged. The first period had been but a light preliminary affair before the death struggle. So far he had a slight advantage over the Detroit youth, but two periods remained to be played. . . .

Dave came up to stand over him.

"How's it?" he asked guardedly.

Jerry opened his eyes, half shrugged and winced.

"Could be better."

The trainer's eyes were worried. "There isn't anything more I can do, Jerry. With this thing a secret, my hands are tied."

"I know.—I'll make out."

"You sure got him so far," said Dave, his face brightening. "Just keep that up and you'll be set."

"Just keep it up." Jerry closed his eyes and the trainer went away.

The ten-minute rest period seemed to last forever. The veteran was keyed up and nervous. The next two periods would either make or break him—if he could last that long. The bullet wound was certain to become more and more irritated. It boiled down to a question of whether he could last. It was agonizing waiting. He wanted to get it over with; wanted to have his fate decided.

At last the referee's whistle sounded

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from outside the door. Jerry was the first one out of the door and onto the ice. He skated to his position and waited, his nerves taut, as the two teams lined up with exasperating languor. Even the referee seemed to hold the puck poised above the crossed sticks of the centers longer than usual. And then dropped it.

And Jerry, who had been keenly anxious for the hostilities to be resumed, found himself in the next few minutes fighting furiously to repel the high-powered attacks of the rejuvenated Detroit Greyhounds. Right from the drop of the puck, they had accelerated into sudden, high-powered action. Three-man power attacks sizzled down the ice, to sweep in and around the cursing, battling Eskimo defense.

Men of the New York team were rocked back on their very heels by the ferocity of the attacks. Jerry threw himself with reckless abandon into the shifting, swirling combinations. In the excitement and stress of the moment, he forgot his wounded shoulder as he body-checked and threw his weight against the charging puck carriers.

The Eskimo goal keeper babbled unheard frantic instructions as he blocked the deluge of shots that seemed to spring from every side. The Garden was rocking with the roars of the fans. It *was* a hockey game—real, he-man, slashing, mile-a-minute game.

And then, like the shifting of an hour glass, the harassed Eskimos turned their defensive tactics into a wild, zipping offensive. They swept down upon the Detroit nets three strong.

FOR fifteen full minutes the battle swirled from one end of the skate-scarred ice to the other. And not once had either red light gleamed to indicate a score. Substitutes came over the boards in waves to relieve their hard-pressed regulars. Sticks were carried high, and tempers were on edge. Time after time, the referee's whistle blasted through the din of the battle to penalize a player. The timekeeper's bench had a steady stream of prisoners. It was whirlwind stuff, and the fans were eating it up.

Jerry's head was spinning dizzily as he crouched forward on the right defense. His left arm felt as if it had been pulled out by the roots. Streams of perspiration coursed down from his sopping wet hair. His eyes were feverish and glistening. Everything told him that he couldn't last much longer. His arm was even now practically useless, and his whole side seemed numb. Three times he had been called to the bench to rest, and each time his stay had been cut short when the enemy, taking advantage of his absence, had tried frantically to drive the puck past the eagle-eyed Eskimo goalie. The private feud with Ace was forgotten for the moment. Individuals didn't matter. Every Greyhound had to be stopped.

With three minutes to go before the end of the second period, the New York center brought every spectator in the entire Garden to his feet. He hooked the puck from a sprinting Greyhound wingman, whirled, and like a stab of zig-zagging lightning streaked at break-neck speed through the entire Greyhound team to pull the goalie out of his cage and slap the disk inside for a goal. The very roof of the colossal sport arena threatened to be blasted sky high by the terrific ovation. The New York Eskimos had scored again!

Excitement was still at fever pitch when the puck was faced off at center ice. The play was concentrated in the

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neutral zone, with no player able to break through. Suddenly the Eskimo right wing took possession of the disk, wriggled and twisted his way through the press of players, and shot from well outside the defense. The drive was yards wide of the net, and the puck thudded into the boards at the back of the rink.

Jerry's pain-filled eyes swept from the scene of action to the time clock and back again. One minute of the period playing time remained. He knew that he couldn't last much longer without some rest. And then he realized, almost with horror, that Ace Jones had skated back and was at that moment whirling around his own net with the puck on his stick.

The Detroit youth's skates flashed brightly in the light as he raced down the ice and angled over to the right alley. An Eskimo forward, his stick trailing, threw himself at Ace. Ace coolly passed the puck across to a Greyhound forward who was speeding down the center of the ice. The man promptly returned the disk as another New York forward swept across his path.

Jerry's heart was pounding in his side. His head felt dull and stupid. His opponent, the youth who wanted his job, was at that moment tearing straight down on him, at an express train rate. He had to be stopped somehow. The duel was flaming up again. . . .

The veteran forced himself out of his lethargic state. Ace came skating like mad, his course as unswerving as the flight of an arrow. Five yards away, four—three! Curry moved over. Jerry held his stick rigidly, his whole body tense and poised. The Detroit youth sped straight in on him. The veteran stabbed out his long stick in a rapier-like thrust, and sidestepped quickly. The tip of his blade caught the puck on Ace's stick, knocked it back in a beautifully timed poke check. Ace's speed carried him streaking past Jerry. He grazed Jerry's arm in passing.

Jerry dug in his skates, sprinted ahead to take the loose puck on his stick, and was striking up the ice in the next second when the gong rang loudly. The second period was over! *New York Eskimos: 2—Detroit Greyhounds: 0.*

TEN minutes' rest!—Ten speeding minutes in which to inject the last drop of strength into aching muscles; to steel his protesting body for the last lap.

Nerves throbbed feverishly in his temples; in his very head. His arm felt mangled and useless. The slightest movement sent a torrent of fire searing through his veins. Would he be able to see it through? Could he go on nerve alone? He now held a decided advantage over his youthful opponent, and the Eskimos were leading two goals to nothing. But a full playing period stretched like eons ahead of him. Twenty minutes of cruel, killing action to show that he was better than Ace Jones!

The veteran lay unmoving on the bench. Around him every man on the squad was stretched out in the dressing room. The strain and pace of the second period had been inhumanly exhausting.

He gazed at the ceiling; dull-eyed, he watched a fly become enmeshed in a spider's web and struggle to release itself as the hairy layer of the death trap moved closer and closer. Twenty minutes to go. . . .

As from a great distance, Jerry heard the referee's whistle sound out-

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side in the corridor. He heard the door slam open, and Dave's voice say:

"All right, gang."

The noise of skates hitting the board flooring followed. He was groggy as he got to his feet and trailed along.

"Bill Williams wanted to see you, Jerry."

The veteran raised his sunken head and looked to the right, to find the Eskimo trainer walking beside him down the passageway to the ice.

"Williams?"

"Bill Williams.—You know, the newspaper guy who got you out of that night club."

Jerry remembered. It was as if a knife had lopped the fuss from his tangled thoughts. He came back to himself with a jolt.

"What did he want?"

"He didn't say. He wanted to see you. But I wouldn't let him. I wanted you to rest."

Jerry's eyes were worried. What did the *Star* man want with him? Had something unforeseen cropped up out of the trouble the previous night?

"Okay. I'll see him—later."

He stepped through the opening in the boards to the ice and skated toward the Eskimo goal.

CHAPTER VII.

FAKE TRIPPER.

THE fans were noisy as the teams lined up. Jerry drew a deep, long breath, fingered his hockey stick, and mentally lashed himself to a keen alertness. It would be over soon. All he had to do was keep going and protect his arm against further injury. His fighting spirit came to his aid, and fought back the panicky feeling that was threatening to engulf him.

The puck went into play. Both teams were obviously still far from being completely rested. Even the frenzied shouts from the stands failed to spur them into producing the sizzling hockey that had high-lighted the second period. The Eskimos lay back on the defensive and allowed the Greyhounds to carry the fight to them.

The New York forward line stretched across the ice and fought back the repeated rushes of the Detroit players. And when a Greyhound did break through, they pursued and worried him into shooting from far out. Jerry watched their performance, his eyes grateful. It seemed to him that his loyal teammates were fighting desperately to protect him against any injury and stress.

And then the Eskimo center drew a two-minute penalty for holding.

He was no sooner in the box and the puck faced off, when the Greyhounds launched a sudden, high-powered offensive. The puck was snared by the Detroit center. He pivoted, slipped around his check, and sped down the ice, his two wingmen racing along with him. The three-man combination was reinforced unexpectedly by Ace Jones, who came tearing down from his defense position.

Jerry sucked in his breath, crouched forward, his eyes narrowed. It was going to be tough.

The two Eskimo forwards threw themselves recklessly into the breach. The puck passed smoothly from one attacker to another, and then the Detroiters were through, and were pounding for the defense. Curry and Jerry moved apart.

The Greyhounds crossed the blue line as the crowd roared with excitement. The puck clicked from the right winger's stick to the Detroit center, to

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Ace Jones. In and in they raced. Jerry eased over to block the speeding youth. And in that second, Ace slammed the puck quickly back to his right wing, and charged straight at the veteran!

Jerry braced himself as Ace crashed into him with stunning force. The impact jarred every nerve in Jerry's body; threw him staggering back. He stumbled, fell to his knees, with Ace half draped over him. A murderous gleam was in the youngster's eye, and in that very moment he deliberately drew back the butt end of his hockey stick - - jabbed it hard against Jer- shoulder!

A wave of soul-searing pain :emed to engulf the Eskimo player'; whole body. Flame burst before his e_ .s. He fought grimly to hold a consciousness that threatened to leave him. Dimly, he heard a rolling thunder of shouting voices. Ace moved back, his eyes on the veteran, his full lips curled.

Jerry's iron will forced him to stagger to his feet, and held him erect. His spinning head cleared, and he found himself facing the Eskimo goal. The goalie was pulling the puck from the inside of the cage, and the red light was burning brightly. The Greyhounds had scored!

Curry came over.

"You hurt?"

"No—I'm all right. A litt!: _.oggy. —Nothing."

JERRY moved back to his position, shaken and dizzy. One thought flashed back and forth across his churning brain. Ace had done it deliberately. He had tried to disable him by attacking his wounded arm. The veteran was white-lipped, as a cold rage swept over him. He had received the bullet wound saving the youth's life. ....

That wave of intense anger helped him to get a grip on himself. He looked down the ice. The jubilant Detroit squad was spread out in battle formation, waiting for play to be resumed. The Eskimo center was still in the penalty box.—*New York Eskimos: 2—Detroit Greyhounds: 1.*

Again the puck was dropped, and again the Greyhound forward line, reinforced by Ace's presence, came racing down the ice four abreast. They were carrying the fight to their op- ments, and were pressing their one-man advantage. The puck crisscrossed from one man's stick to another as they shot like stabs of lightning through the stubbornly checking pair of Eskimo forwards.

It was Curry who saved the situation. As the Greyhound carrying the puck rushed toward him, the Eskimo defense man feinted, forced the Detroit player to swerve, and then closed in on him, his stick chopping down at the puck. His aim was deadly accurate. The puck leaped from the player's stick, shot in a wabbling arc up the ice.

Jerry lunged forward for the loose disk. Instinct alone, born of years of hockey playing, forced him ahead. He had taken three hasty strides when Ace Jones cut across in front of him, swerved, and stopped dead.

The veteran twisted his body to protect his left arm, and jolted heavily against the other. It was obvious that the youth had tried to make him take the force of the impact on his left side. And despite Jerry's instinctive protective move, the sudden jarring rocked him from head to toe.

Ace's face was within a few inches of Jerry's; it was vicious in its expression. His eyes thin, he said:

"I'm going to get you, Palmer!"

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Jerry looked steadily at him, forcing himself to be calm. "You're yellow, Ace.—You showed it last night."

The youth shoved against Jerry, backed away and skated on up the ice. An Eskimo forward had golfed the disk far up into Detroit territory.

As a Greyhound wingman raced back to retrieve it, the penalized Eskimo center returned to the ice; and again the teams were battling on even terms. The play see-sawed the full length of the ice, with the Detroit squad striving to drive in the tying goal.

Minutes clicked away. The action grew faster and faster. The strain of the battle was telling on both teams. The checking became hard and rough, as nerves were worn to a raw edge. Jerry played automatically, his brain seemed to be detached from his body. The referee's whistle blew for an offside, and a substitute came out to relieve the veteran. He skated over to the bench, sat down, felt Dave throw a blanket around him.

"You'd better quit, Jerry," he whispered.

Jerry stared out at the ice vacantly, but he said nothing.

"I saw what Ace was doing. You can't last.—It'll kill you."

"I'll last," said Jerry slowly.

AS the playing time grew shorter and shorter, the tension heightened. And then the inevitable fight broke out. An Eskimo forward checked a Detroit puck carrier roughly into the boards. Sticks were dropped and both men pitched into each other, their fists swinging. The referee's whistle blasted as the fans came to their feet, shouting. The two players were pulled apart and banished to the penalty box for five minutes.

Jerry returned to the ice, his face strained, his lips a white line. There remained but ten minutes more of the period. He could hang on that long. . . .

Afterward, he had only a hazy idea of what occurred during the next few minutes. He seemed to be repelling a veritable horde of Detroit players as they descended upon him. He lost track of time, and he knew only that neither team had scored again. Ace Jones repeatedly came down on the attack, to pass the puck at the last moment and crash heavily into the veteran. Feeling seemed to have left him. His whole body was growing numb.

The two penalized players came back to their hard-pressed teams—and Jerry realized suddenly that there remained but five minutes to go.

The fog swept out of his brain momentarily, as he looked up the ice. The puck had been snared by the Detroit center. He was swinging down the rink with his two wingmen racing with him. And then Jerry saw Ace skating madly to join in the assault—a four-man attack!

The checking Eskimo forwards were swept aside as the smooth-passing combination thundered toward the New York goal. Ace was carrying the puck down the right boards. Jerry moved over to meet him, his gauntleted right hand clenching his stick tightly. The puck carrier careened toward him, faked a pass, and with a slash of scraped ice, attempted to cut around the veteran. Jerry was crouched down, his stick close to the ice. As Ace raced past Jerry swept his stick in a great arc. The blade crashed against Ace's and swept on, missing the youth's right skate by a fraction of an inch. The puck was jolted loose, shot back spinning along the boards.

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Jerry's eyes were on it. He broke away, hooked the disk on his stick, and drove himself up the ice. One lone Greyhound defense man lay between him and the goal. He looked back, slackened speed.

ACE was lying on the ice and writhing. The referee stood near the Eskimo goal and blew his whistle again. Jerry circled back. The white-jerseyed official jabbed his thumb at the veteran and then jerked it over his shoulder. A penalty.

Ace was slowly getting to his feet.

"Two minutes—tripping."

The referee's words were curt.

Jerry shook his head dizzily and looked over at the youth. Ace had a half-smile on his face.

"I didn't trip him," Jerry said, almost stupidly.

Ace skated over. "I suppose I tripped myself."

The referee waved his hand. "Two minutes.—Hurry up."

Jerry stifled the furious words that came to his lips, and skated over to the penalty box. He knew that Ace had faked the fall, and that to the referee the sweep check had looked like an intentional trip. But there was no sense in arguing. The official's word was law.

The veteran climbed stiffly into the box as the puck was faced off again. Ace was resorting to every kind of underhanded trick. . . .

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN AGAINST MAN.

THE Greyhounds kept four men on the attack. With their backs against the wall, the New York squad fought with dogged fury. One minute of Jerry's time ticked away. Detroit had the Eskimos completely bottled up, and were repeatedly drilling smoking shots at the harassed goalie. The crowd thundered as he made miraculous, sensational stops.

Thirty seconds of the penalty time remained—twenty. . . . Jerry's right hand gripped the rail; his pain-racked body was rigid as he waited for the timekeeper's release.

The puck slid back to center ice. Ace Jones streaked after it, took the disk on his stick, whirled on a dime and hurtled back for the Eskimo net. He darted to the right, spun past a slashing New Yorker, whirled around the player who was filling Jerry's place—and shot. The goalie threw himself across the opening a split second too late. The puck thudded into the cords and fell to the ice. . . .

Jerry heard the timekeeper's curt: "Go!"

He was half over the boards. The red light gleamed and the score was tied.—*New York Eskimos: 2—Detroit Greyhounds: 2.*

The veteran skated back to his position. A tied score—and in two minutes the full playing time would be up. Then — overtime. He knew he couldn't last any longer. It was beyond human endurance. His head started to swim again. Two minutes to go!

The face-off was taken by the Detroit center, and the Greyhounds again threw four men into the attack, leaving Ace Jones alone on the defense. Jerry watched the attackers charging down on him, sweeping through the forwards, coming on and on. The puck carrier crossed the blue line, tensed his wrists, and shot!

The veteran saw the puck suddenly streaking to his right. The Greyhound line was racing in for the rebound.

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Jerry lifted his right arm suddenly and stabbed it out in the path of the speeding puck. A sharp pain drilled up his good arm, and then he saw the disk spinning on the ice in front of him.

Life seemed to sweep into his limbs, into his brain, at that very moment. He threw himself forward, took the puck on his blade, and was crashing up the ice before the speeding Detroit players could realize what had happened. Jerry held his stick in his right hand as he hurtled ahead, guiding the puck. His left arm hung limply at his side.

Ahead—Ace Jones, alone on the defense, and the Greyhound goalie! The veteran was past center ice. Ace crouched down, waiting. Wild, incoherent thoughts spun through Jerry's brain. He knew he couldn't shoot with his left arm useless. The only thing left to do was rush in to the very mouth of the goal—one-handed.

He streaked over the blue line and headed dead on for the youth. Ace backed toward his own goal, uncertainly.

THE strange duel between the veteran and the youth reached its sheer peak in that split-second. Time seemed to stand still. One man or the other had to break. A complete, absolute, total show-down.—The past swirling events of the previous evening, of the foregoing periods, were swept aside. It was individual against individual. Man against man. The acid test; the final analysis. The veteran or the youth. One or the other.

It was Ace. His eyes wide, his lips distorted, he broke under the terrific strain—cracked wide open. Goaded to a mad frenzy, he threw himself, his stick slashing, at the on-rushing Eskimo veteran.

A half-sob was wrung from Jerry's lips. He swerved sharply, streaked around the crazed youth, and was in on the Greyhound goalie in the next fraction of a second. A red haze was before his eyes. Strangely detached, almost in the rôle of a spectator, he saw the goalie charge out of his cage. Jerry pulled his stick close to him, jerked the rubber aside, and twisted his body. The goal was open and unprotected.

He felt that he was losing his grip on himself; the whole world was spinning. With a supreme effort, he jerked the stick up—and saw the puck lazily leave the blade, to float into the goal. He had scored!

Like a man in a trance, he skated behind the goal and headed back to the Eskimo defense. The lucid intervals in his brain were spread far apart after that. He knew that the whole Garden was booming with noise; that his teammates were thronging around him. And then he was standing again in his position and watching a white-jerseyed referee drop the puck between the centers' crossed sticks. And as the rubber circle went into play, the gong clanged. The game was over, and it had been won!

TEN minutes later, as the doctor finished bandaging his arm, he felt almost normal again.

"... The cab driver told the cops," went on Bill Williams of the *Evening Star*, "and some one in the joint recognized your face. I was tipped off that the coppers knew about you being there, so I came up here quick to tell you. I didn't know until a little while ago that they wanted to pin a medal or something on you for collecting a brace of public enemies."

Jerry strained up from his prone position on the rubbing table. "Does

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every one know now, Dave?" he asked the trainer. "Does the Major know about last night?"

Before he could answer, the dressing room door opened and Major Rogers and the Eskimo manager, Ben Allen, came in. They walked over to the table. Jerry watched them, his face expressionless.

The president of the club looked down at the veteran and extended his right hand.

"That was good work, Jerry," he said. His handshake was firm. "Don't worry about any of these trade rumors." He glanced sharply at Allen beside him.

"I won't, sir," said Jerry.

"And—Molly told me all about last night. I don't know how to thank you for looking after her.—If you feel well enough, I wish you'd come down to my hotel, later. A team out in Seattle has made an offer for Ace Jones, and you might be able to help me arrange the details." The corners of his lips quirked.

"I'll be there," Jerry said.

The Major nodded, and went out.

Allen was standing in the middle of the room talking to no one in particular in a loud voice.

"I'll spread it all over the newspapers. Playing a full game with a bullet wound in his arm. The fans will eat it up. He'll be a hero. I'll—"

"Say, can I break this news?" asked the reporter.

The manager swung around. "Break it? Why, man, give it the works! Spread it on thick!"

Bill Williams tugged on his overcoat and headed for the door. "Just let me get to a phone!" he said.

Allen followed after him. "Why, this man Palmer's got flash—news interest—color!"

His voice came from the corridor outside. "Yes, sir, I know color when I see it."

Dave snorted. "*Color!*" he said disgustedly, half to himself. "Why, that dumb cluck Allen has been color blind for years!"

THE END

America's Earliest Subway

MODEST indeed was New York's first attempt at subway building in 1873, for the original line was but a single block long, running under the Broadway sidewalk from Warren Street to Murray Street. The builder, whose name has been forgotten, leased a basement at the Warren Street end. Four months later he invited the public to a gala opening. New Yorkers viewed the work with surprise, since it had been kept a secret. They found a well-lighted tunnel through which they could either walk or ride in a single car which was driven by air pressure generated by a steam engine. A telegraph served to call the engineer from the other end of the line. No good reason has been offered for building a subway at this particular point, unless it was to prove that the work could be carried on without disturbing traffic.

J. W. Holden.

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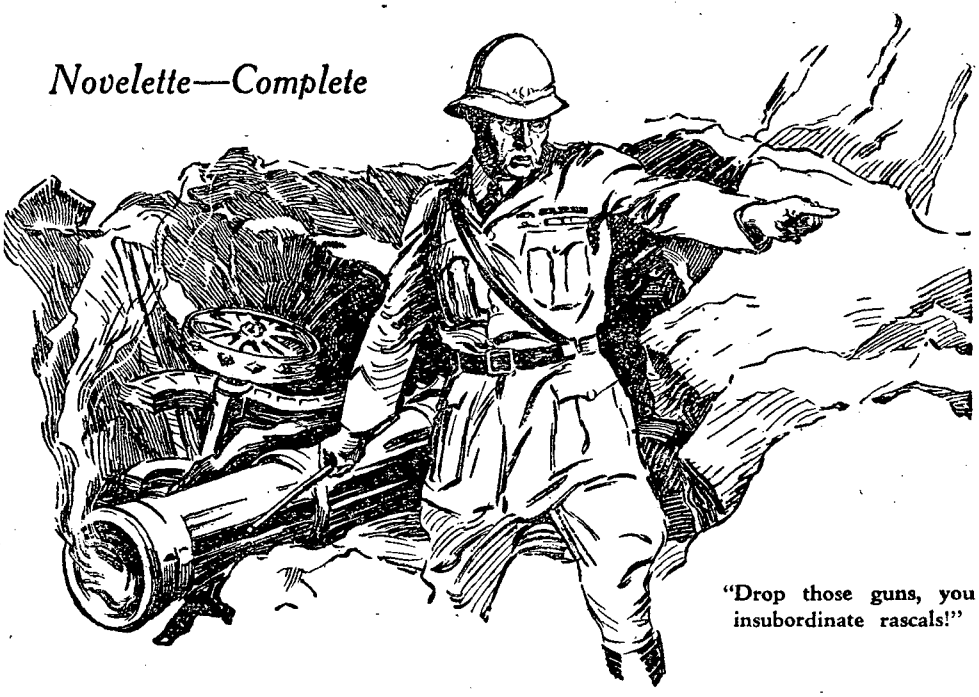
Murder on Gibraltar

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Last Minute," "Dead Man's Answer," etc.

Death and horror were storming the mighty Rock of Gibraltar and striking down the garrison

Novelette—Complete



"Drop those guns, you insubordinate rascals!"

CHAPTER I.

DEATH IN THE DAYLIGHT!

"JERRODBY SPARROW — well, I'm damned!"

"Scotland Yard!"

And that was the way it started—one of the strangest cases Dr. Jerrodby Sparrow ever tangled in—by a chance meeting on a curious old street in one of the oldest, strangest towns in the world.

Hands grabbed, they stood on the curb; the tall, ponderous Englishman in faded drill glaring down at the little American with the bright monocle in his perspiring face. Snarling, scowling at and abusing each other with the happy camaraderie of old friends unexpectedly encountered.

Traffic on Waterport Street flowed, clicking and murmurous, about them in the dusty sunshine. Carts and burrows, honking flivvers, Spaniards with baskets of wine, British colonials, ragged Moors, sailors jabbering in a dozen tongues, beggars and Arabs in whiskers and tarbooshes, hurrying with rugs and junk to catch the new crop of tourists on the mole. Gibraltar was noisy, active and hot, under the frowning battlements of the

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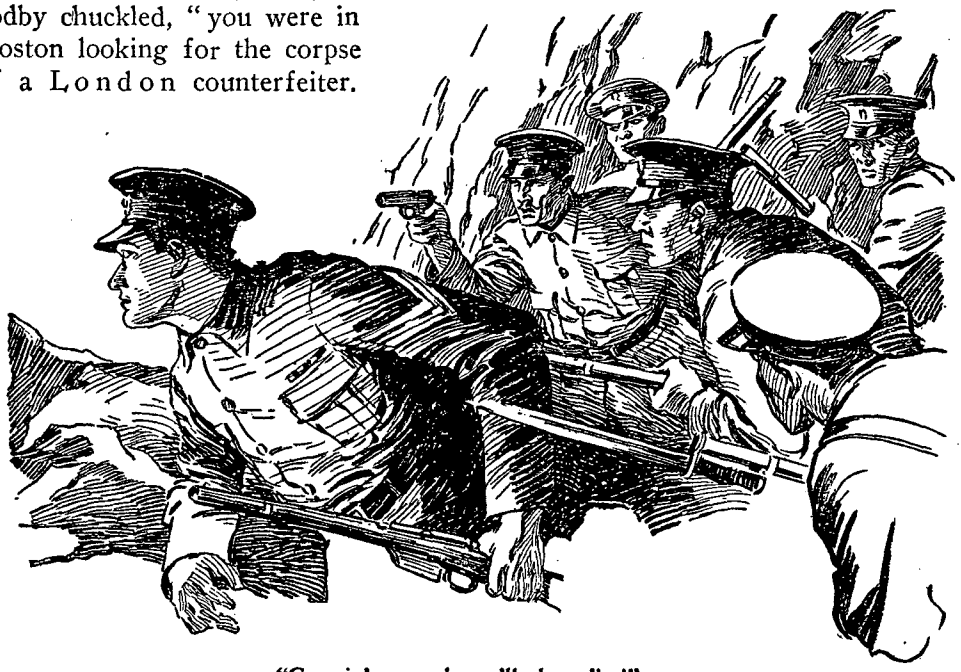
"Rock" overlooking the rooftops. Even in daylight, Jerrodby reflected, that towering, fortified cliff was something grim.

"And what the devil are you doing here?" the Englishman demanded, crushing the American's hand. "Believe me, it's good to see you!"

"Last time I saw you," Jerrodby chuckled, "you were in Boston looking for the corpse of a London counterfeiter.

"Sparrow," he said, "you're a godsend. Everybody on the inside knows you're the smartest criminal investigator going—and you can't lie out of it this morning. You'll see the Rock, all right, although the others *won't*. No visitors have been allowed up there in the last four weeks, old



"Creepin' around—we'll show 'im!"

Scotland Yard after its man. I tell you, Sir Henry, I'm on the first vacation I've had in thirty years.—Mediterranean cruise." He waved his hat at the red and black stacks of the liner anchored gracefully in mid bay. "Just got in on the Laronia, there, and came ashore early, to avoid the rush and to see this Rock of Gibraltar.—What are you doing here yourself? Last time I saw *you* was in a morgue!"

Sir Henry Macklington, Inspector C. I. D., put tight fingers into Jerrodby's elbow and drew him into the doorway of a pub.

man. Because there's hell to pay, Jerrodby; and there hasn't been such hell since the British stormed and captured the place under Rooke. The last time you saw me was in a morgue in America, right enough. Well, I'm in one again, here and now—in Gibraltar. And I hope to Heaven you'll help me out!"

MURDER had struck through the Pillars of Hercules, at the strongest fortress in the world. On the frowning cliffs above the little town a colonel's wife, the colonel himself, and a major had been shot down.

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Scotland Yard had come, because the killing guns weren't pistols, but cannon. Also, because death had struck in daylight and had left no trail. Because blasts were fired by a hand unseen, from guns that hadn't spoken for three hundred years.

In the shadows of the otherwise deserted taproom where they sat over goblets of Old Crusted, Jerrodby listening stiff-eared to his friend's story, Sir Henry's clipped, low speech biting through the gauzy smoke of one cigarette after another. The thing was fantastic enough. More fantastic, however, were the sweatbeads and confusion on the face of this Englishman whom Jerrodby had known for years as the sharpest man in the service. And in the light of the hot sunshine that washed the front windows and baked white the outer street, the thing was impossible.

Jerrodby listened in grim amazement.

"Three of them!" the inspector was telling. "Three, by gad! In the last blessed month—and all of them important people, damn it! Blown to bits in broad daylight, Jerrodby, and—and it isn't possible!" He glared at the little American, yanked a handkerchief from a cuff and patted at sweatbeads on his quivering double chin. "Have you ever fired a cannon?"

Jerrodby smiled. "Nearest I ever came to it was firing a fat woman from the City Medical Examiner's office, and it took three or four of us to do it. I understand it usually demands a gun crew of some kind."

"Why, dash it all!" the Englishman confided. "It always takes at least one. Even those old muzzle-loading Moorish guns with the touch-hole in the top of the breech. Somebody has to be there to touch them off—put a match to the breech and set fire to the powder charge. The confounded things *can't* sit on their foundations and bang off of their own accord. Yet that's just what they seem to be doing!"

Jerrodby nodded. "What do the guns look like, Sir Henry?"

The Britisher's finger began a diagram on the damp table top. "I might tell you a bit about Gibraltar, to start with. It's a big place, and old as the devil. You'll see, the Rock is honeycombed with tunnels and gunpits and open galleries, cut there by the Moors before the Spanish succession. I guess it's about fourteen hundred feet up the cliff, and these galleries go up about halfway. The British guns, the modern naval guns and aërial batteries are at the top of the Rock, in the crown. We won't see them."

"And these Moorish guns?"

"The galleries are full of the bloody things. Mounted on old stone blocks, and pointing out to sea, and not worth their weight as scrap iron. Old bronze and brass museum pieces, I tell you, all rusted green and full of spiders. The War Office left them on their mountings for tourists to stare at, I suppose, and they haven't been fired in three hundred years. You can damned well fancy how the guard hopped when that first one went off!"

THE guard had hopped, all right, for it had happened at eleven o'clock in the morning of a clear blue day—"A day like this!" Sir Henry snarled—with the sun attaining the zenith and the Mediterranean gleaming indigo and the town below busily at peace. The garrison on the Rock clicking through its immutable, routine army life; the sentries yawning and gazing out to sea; the squad drilling and clanking around the bar-

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rackrooms on the lower gallery; Tommy Atkins in the smooth machine of Briton's military life, dull as a clock, in peacetime.

And then it happened—a sudden, stunning *smash!* The Tommy mounting guard just around the corner of the gallery almost dropped dead with astonishment.

"The lad almost dropped dead a second time when he dashed from his station and rushed up the gallery and saw what had happened," Sir Henry declared. "There was this old gun, sitting in its shallow gun-pit, smoke pouring from the muzzle and leaking from a hundred rents split in the barrel. *And there was nobody there!* Only the Tommy, staring pop-eyed. But some one had been there, I can tell you that! Some one had been standing in front of that cannon. There was blood," he whispered. "It was spattered all over the stones; all over the blocks on either side of the gunport; everywhere. The body was found halfway down the cliff, on an old, unused gallery far below. Blown right over the wall, by gad! Not enough left of it to put in a coffin! It was terrible—terrible!"

"The woman was the first one killed, then?"

"Righto. The wife of Colonel Irving Outram. It wasn't a cannon ball that was used; just scrap and rubble and nails and stones. A terrific charge. The victim was literally blown from that cannon's mouth. Of course the place was in an uproar instantly. It seems she wasn't too popular with the post—you know army life—all the petty gossip and bridge-playing and jealousy among the wives and what not. Petty social cliques are the bane of these army garrisons. A major's wife won't speak to a lieutenant's; that sort of thing. And Mrs. Outram, I gather, was a pompous sort of woman, good looking enough to cause trouble, unpleasantly snobbish, liable to put on the dog and enjoy scandal-mongering. In the year she and her husband had been stationed here, she'd made herself jolly well disliked. But, good Lord, no one kills a colonel's wife for that!"

At first they'd thought it was suicide. The Tommy mounting guard said he'd seen the woman stroll around the corner to that gallery only a moment before. He'd been on the scene ten seconds after the shot was fired. The ancient gallery was about fifty feet long and fifteen feet wide. On one side, the cliff went straight up thirty feet to another gallery—"Like tiers, you know," as Sir Henry described them—on the other hand, the sheer drop over the old stone railing. At the far end of the gallery was a tunnel leading to a heliograph station. Away off to south, east, west, the blue Mediterranean, the Straits, and a placid sea.

Soldiers and officers came galloping to find the lone Tommy standing bewildered with horror beside the smoking cannon, his face green in the sunshine. He couldn't have fired the shot, having been observed in his sentry box by a guard coming to relieve him at the time.

"There it was. The woman blown to pieces. The cannon still hot. Nobody in sight. No witnesses. The Tommy had been on guard all morning, and the woman was the only one who passed him. The only other entry to the gallery was by the tunnel at the other end—the passage from the heliograph station. The soldiers were wild with excitement, and there was even wilder excitement when it was found

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that Colonel Outram, the dead woman's husband, had been in the heliograph station at the time of the crash. Up there alone on inspection of some kind. Of course, he might have sneaked down to the gallery, fired that blast at his wife, and rushed back into the tunnel. But nobody dared make such a charge. He was clearly as bewildered as anybody. The only answer was that somehow Mrs. Outram had secretly loaded the gun, then sneaked out there alone and fired it at herself. Suicide.—But no lanyard or fuse was found. She'd been standing in the gun ports at the cannon's mouth. How could she have touched off the powder in the breech? Five days later, after a whirlwind investigation that led nowhere, the old commander declared it to be a case of accidental death. And then—"

AND then Colonel Outram himself had been killed in the same outlandish fashion, by an ancient b r o n z e culverin, a decayed old cannon squatting on another abandoned gallery, at the base of the cliff. At eleven o'clock in the morning, too, on a clear, sunshiny day.

The colonel, off duty, had gone to his death alone and unnoticed. The majority of men in the post were getting ready for inspection in their barrackrooms.

"The gun blew with a terrific smash," Sir Henry r e c o u n t e d. "Jarred it clean off its base. The man was riddled—body in tatters—chest filled with bits of slag iron, nails, chunks of bottle glass, and even stones. You can load those old pieces of ordnance with anything, it seems.—Suicide? Not this trip. About the only piece left of the man was his left hand, and in the mangled fingers they found this note."

The inspector fished a scrap from his pocket; flattened the paper under Jerrodby Sparrow's fascinated gaze. Cords tightened in the little man's necknape. Blood-stains like dried smears of k e t c h u p were on the wrinkled paper. And the message read:

"Colonel Outram. If you go alone at the hour of eleven to the old culverin gun and look inside you will find the answer to your wife's murder."

Pencilled in a scrawl obviously disguised.

"He found it, all right," Sir Henry growled. "A blast that tore him to shreds. Imagine! The poor devil peering into that muzzle. Maybe reaching an arm. The soldiers tell me they often hid notes, packages, even smuggled goods, in the old guns. Maybe Outram expected a letter.—But it's murder. Who fired that shot? About four thousand men in the garrison at the time, and every one of them checked up and accounted for. Outram's murdered; his wife is murdered; the garrison is seething with suspicion and fear. That's when G. H. Q. asked for Scotland Yard. And I came from London double quick."

"Then you got here about three weeks ago?" He frowned. Jerrodby counted.

"Right!" the inspector snapped. "The place was in the devil of a mess! Murder in the British army is no joke, you know. I found the commander up there in a stew, but doing all he could—a nice old boy. Maybe you've heard of him? General Sir Douglas Barton, V. C., K. C. M. G. Military to his bootstraps, but getting a bit old and fussy—liable to lose his

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glasses. Nobody's fool, though. Been in the service for years.

"Seems he joined up as a Tommy in Egypt, fought in the Sudan, and showed such genius they gave him a commission after a few weeks of fighting. Came back to Sandhurst, was transferred to Malta, given high command under Sir John French with the Old Contemptibles at the start of the Great War. He's been in command here the last five years and expects to retire soon, I believe. Sort of an honorary position; he's a history scholar, has won a degree in astronomy, written a treatise on the siege of Gibraltar and a life of Chinese Gordon. He knows the army, his men, and Gibraltar like a book. He's turned up heaven and earth to solve this case; a terrible shock to have such a bloody affair on the record of his garrison. If *he* couldn't find any clues, how could I? But the first thing I found was another note."

"A note to the murdered woman?" Jerrodby suggested.

Sir Henry dropped a cigarette from nervous fingers.

"How'd you know?"

"Merely guessed she might have been lured to her doom the same way as her husband."

"Precisely. I found the letter lodged in a crevice down the wall where she'd tumbled. I'd been hunting to see if anybody'd climbed the damned wall, maybe. Well, I found *her* letter; that was all. If we'd found it sooner we might have saved her husband. The message invited her to look for a 'nice surprise' in that certain cannon at eleven o'clock. She'd been tricked the same way her husband was afterwards, and a murderer wrote those two notes."

"Somebody who hated the pair plenty. Could you trace the writing or dig up any sort of motive?"

"HUNTED my damned eyes blind," Sir Henry snarled, "and couldn't trail those notes an inch. Naturally, I started an inquiry into the family history. Both the deceased were around fifty years of age; maybe a little older. They'd met and married in India. Transferred from there to Burma, they came to Gibraltar just last year. Now, their best friends were two officers who came here with them—Major Hamilcar Jackson and Major Edwin E. H. Perseus. It seems the four had come from the Orient together; they had always been inseparable, and in the same army stations. Thirty years ago they were all at Peshawar, India, together; the three men as young lieutenants in artillery, the woman as the fiancée of another young officer named Harris. And," Sir Henry said thoughtfully, "there's an odd little bit of history 'way back there."

He pinched out his cigarette and lit another.

"A war started with the Afghans," he went on, "and the town was besieged. Their outpost was getting shot to hell. At the same time, there was trouble *in* the outpost. The captain had a lot of pay money in the strong box, and he was murdered during the battle and the box was stolen. A knife with initials on the handle was found in the captain's throat, and the knife belonged to this Lieutenant Harris."

"All this happened thirty years ago in India?"

"Right. And during that battle Harris vanished, and so did the money. Afterward the girl and Outram and Jackson and Perseus led a manhunt to find Harris, accusing him of murder.

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He never was found; might have been killed in the battle. Anyhow, Outram married the girl; and as I say, with Jackson and Perseus, they were transferred to Burma, coming to Gibraltar only last year."

"Wherewith," Jerrodby said, watching a fly amble across the ceiling, "the colonel and his wife are blown to pieces.—Who told you this story?"

"Well, Major Jackson. As he was a close friend of the Outrams, upon my arrival here I questioned him at once. He sent for the other fellow, Major Perseus, and together they told me the yarn. It was the only light they could throw on the murders, and it seems they believed that the man Harris might have come back out of the past and spotted the Outrams here in Gibraltar."

"Murdered them out of revenge—something on that order?"

"So Jackson and Perseus believed. It is true, Harris is still on the black list in England, as a murderer wanted and missing. And the woman had testified she saw him stab the captain that night. But it's preposterous that the man could pop up after thirty years. Further, it's incredible that he'd be here in Gibraltar—maybe one of the Tommies in the line, as the two majors seemed to believe. A good many of the men are veterans, middle-aged, but all of them have been examined; and anyway none could have fired the shots."

"How about the officers in the garrison?" Jerrodby observed. "They'd have freedom to move about—go around unchallenged—"

"That's right. But General Barton knows them all. He assures me they're a splendid lot, and that none of them, save the colonel and those two majors, had ever been stationed in India. I figured that revenge motive was quashed. Then I thought I'd found another motive. I discovered that this Major Hamilcar Jackson was heavily indebted to the murdered couple—gambling and bridge debts—almost a thousand pounds. But the very morning I came across that possibility—Major Hamilcar Jackson also was murdered!"

SIR HENRY dragged a cuff across his forehead.

"I was there in the garrison. Ha! A man practically slaughtered under my nose. At the time, he was on his way to the postal bureau after his mail, walking through a tunnel from the drill ground. Ten minutes after twelve, exactly. Seems he always went for his mail at that hour. Routine.—There was one of those wretched cannon above the walkway at the end of the tunnel. Nobody thought of it, of course. As Major Jackson came out of the tunnel, it fired. Any one within a radius of ten feet would have caught it. A fearful blast, like shrapnel. The man got a fragment through his brain.—Two minutes later, half the post was on the scene. Nobody was seen leaving the vicinity. No witnesses. Not a clue. No message on the dead man. Nothing. The Tommies were accounted for, to a man."

"An outside job, then?"

"Impossible! Gibraltar is guarded as tight as a drum; it's shut up like a bank at night. An outsider *couldn't* get through the lines! Yet who in Heaven's name fired that third gun?—And nobody walks in front of a cannon when a suspicious looking character is standing at the breech. There must have been some one there—a friend, or some one they wouldn't suspect. No

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shadows to hide in, either. All out in the open." Sir Henry jumped up; began to pace the floor. "Those guns might have been loaded months before, perhaps at night. But Moorish cannon are fired by a gunner who stands by to touch them off, I tell you!—All right. Mrs. Outram killed. Colonel Outram. Now Major Jackson. He got it only yesterday!"

"Lord!" Jerrodby breathed. "Sounds like Chicago. But how about this fourth man among the quartet of friends from the Orient?"

"Major Edwin E. H. Perseus!" The inspector slammed an expired cigarette at the floor. "I jumped at the idea, of course. I didn't like the officer from the start. Quiet. Pale eyes. Mop of fuzzy white hair. Had a feeling the fellow was secretive and was holding something back. Mighty frightened, too, I felt. Though that was natural enough, with his three best friends just killed.—Besides, he has an alibi. He was off duty, and he claims he was in town yesterday. He says he'd been drinking a lot—nerves shot by the tragedy—and that he can't quite remember where he'd been; but I've found a wine merchant who claims the man was in his shop at the time. I was checking up on that before I ran into you this morning."

The inspector swung about fiercely and sat down.

"Well, there's the case! Three victims, and somebody fired those old guns. The Tommies are saying a ghost fired 'em. Soldiers are ranting with superstition, and every man is suspicious of his shadow. Squads are going from cannon to cannon; but it will take days to examine them all; and meanwhile the whole garrison is in a stew. The officers suspect the men; the men suspect the officers.

"And this is Gibraltar—Gibraltar! The proudest stronghold under the Union Jack, smelling of murder and uproar. I tell you, Jerrodby, it's a blow at the whole Empire. General Barton is at his wit's end, and Scotland Yard is getting exactly nowhere, and it's not a ghost we're after, either. It's worse than a ghost. Ghosts don't walk in daylight, Jerrodby, and those cannons were fired in broad daylight, every time." He caught the American's arm in shaky fingers. "You're the smartest medical examiner and the shrewdest criminologist in the business, Jerrodby Sparrow. If you'd just come up for the day and give me a hand—"

Jerrodby nodded and touched a finger to the bright glass disk smiling in his eye.

"My ship doesn't sail till midnight," he said quietly. "Let's go. Your Major Edwin E. H. Perseus rather interests me; and I've always wanted to see this Rock of Gibraltar."

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER CANNON.

BUT he didn't like any of it, the little American told himself as he started off with Sir Henry in a rattling taxi toward this lowering giant in stone that frowned over the town.

Sunshine pooled on the crest of the Rock, but history lurked black in the shadows honeycombing its granite-slabbed face; a history fingering back into the cobwebs of Time, and stained with ancient blood. About this mountain that was the gate to the Mediterranean, siege after siege had stormed. Beyond its shadow on the bay, where smart liners and gray warships an-

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chored to coal, the galleys of Rome had sailed in fear to a Western Ocean of dragons and boundless terror. Carthage and Vandal had crashed the lower slopes where goats now grazed. Tarik ibn Zijad had attacked from Africa, to paint the embattlements red; the pirates of Khair ed Din had scaled the walls with fire and knife; the bay had filled with the mangled bodies of the Moors. The bombardments of Spain, England and France had smothered the heights with shell-fire and flame; up this busy little street where the taxi now rattled had run crimson rivers washing screaming tides of men.

That was Gibraltar; beetling high against the blue; hiding its modern garrison and aërial guns, its search lights and signal stations and Union Jack under the sky; impregnable Great Britain for the past two hundred years. That the ancient guns of the long vanished Moors should thunder among those walls again was something to make a man look over his shoulder, even a one-eyed detective on vacation. Something to give him pause.

Sir Henry Macklington smoked and snarled at the cabby; and Jerrodby Sparrow studied the situation, ticking the facts off in his mind. Three victims murdered in the past four weeks. First the woman. Then the colonel who was her husband. Then the friend of the family, a major. Blown to pieces by cannonfire from those old Moorish guns, each in a different sector of this fortified mountain. The woman and her husband lured by messages. The major killed by a direct shot. No witnesses, no clues, no man found on the scene of the crimes; and the guns must be fired by a touch-hole in the breech. Which meant that some one must have been on hand to fire them—and in broad daylight.

"Broad daylight!" Sir Henry swore. "Some one they—the victims—must have seen. The guns are out in the open, confound it! Some one who was there—and who vanished without leaving a trace. In broad daylight, Jerrodby, and about this time of day!"

Jerrodby's wrist dial said eleven-fifteen, and it was certainly light enough. The town was beginning to perspire under the semitropic blaze. A squad of sweating sailors clattered by, quick-step, on their way to some coaling station waterside. People stood fanning themselves on the curbs. The taxi chugged squawking through a block of traffic, cruised off through the cooler driveways of a green botanical garden, started uphill in a meandering, cobblestone lane, where monkeys gestured from pink and yellow walls and peasant women plucked chickens in blue doorways. Here was a peaceful commingling of Spanish and English.

But presently the taxi, panting up still steeper grades, arrived at a gate where ruddy-cheeked sentries halted the car with bayonets, and where a loud-voiced sergeant stood in the path.

THE inspector from Scotland Yard flashed a pass; the sentries jerked to attention; the sergeant saluted; and the taxi trundled across a fortified level with the town and the bay below and the Mediterranean sweeping a blue circling arm to far horizons east. Protesting noisily, the taxi continued the steep ascent on this road of old cobbles; through a narrow corridor chiseled from living rock; through a gal-

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lery of ancient design reinforced with modern concrete; through another gate of sentries onto a higher level.

Here was a broad area like a plateau hanging above the town; a section of walkways lined with barrack buildings; a small parade ground backed under a gray escarpment of cliff; bungalows that quartered officers and their families. The houses were as uniform and orderly as those of a village street. Army trucks and staff cars were parked along one curb. A squad of enlisted men maneuvered in mid field, to the barking of non-coms. Tommy Atkins was everywhere in evidence, khaki-clad, smart, briskly saluting. Polished officers with swagger sticks hurried on errands. Men in fatigue uniform led strings of artillery ponies. The unmistakable British soldier with his jaunty cap and trim gear and clacking hobnailed boots.

Here was evidence of trained military routine, of men drilled to obedience, of an army post in a mountain of army posts that clicked with the precision of machinery. Crack troops in the strongest fortress of the world.

Impossible that murder could have run riot in this stronghold; yet the American could sense a feeling in the air; a taut undercurrent in the sunshine; something alert in the men mounting guard, in the swift, curious glances of passing officers, expressions tense and mouths grim.

"Artillerymen," Sir Henry pointed out. "The infantry's stationed other side. G. H. Q. over there. You see, the governor's away, and the whole place is in General Barton's command. We'll get in a talk with him before lunch."

Leaving the taxi, they started across the cobbles in the blazing sunshine, Jerrodby mopping his face and covertly glancing at an ancient gun a-top a granite block near by. A relic of long ago, moss grew on its base, and the bronze barrel was green with age and disuse.

"That's one of them," the inspector whispered. "And the galleries are filled with dozens like it. Like so many antique arms pieces in the British Museum. Come along."

The situation gave Jerrodby a feeling of unbelief, the same uncanny feeling that always went through him at sight of curtains blowing in a dark window.

The feeling was out of place here, in this Mediterranean fortress of iron and stone, bathed in heat and that bright morning sunshine. Yet Jerrodby sensed the same tension in his companion, and in the Britons who crowded the outer headquarters office. Guards thumped gunbutts; a captain jerked orders over a desk; subalterns hurried through doors; telephones jingled; and somewhere a short wave radio was talking in a low staccato.

"General Barton will see you at once, sirs."

OFFICERS were dismissed from a rear door; an orderly beckoned and retired; the inspector and Jerrodby stepped into a cool room dimmed with rattan screens, made pleasant by an overhead fan and by walls covered with maps and bookshelves. Jerrodby Sparrow found himself regarding the commander. General Sir Douglas Barton, V. C., K. C. M. G., stood up at once to shake hands; and the little American had the impression of a veteran figure, well past middle life, a stoop to his square shoulders and a heaviness in his brown grip, the embodiment of one grown old

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in military life. Level gray eyes under bushing brows, and iron gray hair touched with a streak of white about two-fingers wide. Grizzled cheeks looped down to sag a trifle at the jaws; a short old nose, as British as a cup of tea; a grizzled chin above a tight-buttoned collar; a kingly mustache, like a pair of white wings, on his upper lip; on his tunic the insignia of high command, and the rainbow-colored service stripe of a dozen campaigns. Here was a portrait, Jerrodby considered, that typified the finest in British military tradition.

Sir Henry was introducing him, and it gave Jerrodby a chance to scrutinize a gaunt old man in a mess jacket who stood over a tea service near the windows, the only other occupant in the room. Jet eyes flickered from this old man's leathery face; black and silver hair hung about his ears. To his surprise, Jerrodby noticed tiny gold earrings and marked a faded red "V" tattooed on the man's thin forehead.

"Gungoo Lal, my batman," the general introduced.

The Hindu salaamed.

General Barton passed a hand across his forehead. "Get along, Gungoo, and see if you can find my glasses. I've misplaced the beastly things again." He swung upon his visitors. "Third pair I've lost this week. Always losing them. Hardly see without them.—This fearful business in my garrison will have me off the deep end. You'll have to excuse us, Dr. Sparrow, if—"

"Beg to interrupt and remind my masters that the general has been unwell."

Coming from the aged servitor at the window, the remark was a surprising one. The deep black eyes of the Asian stabbed accusingly at Jerrodby and the inspector.

"My masters' pardon, but the General Sahib had no sleep last night, and it is time for the medicine—"

The voice was deep-pitched as a rune; it made Jerrodby drop his glass with an involuntary start.

"Get out!"

The commandant struck the desk with a fist, glaring at the retreating Hindu. The man was a shadow slipping through a door; and the officer turned with a low oath, yanked a packet of pills from a drawer and swallowed one.

"I can apologize for him. Gungoo's been with me for years; my servant before I joined the service. Don't know where that Hindu came from, but he's absolutely trustworthy and loyal. Saved my life once in France. We can talk in front of him, Sir Henry; and by Heaven, sirs, it's come to where he's about the only man under my command I *am* sure of. This—this thing is getting beyond me. And damn it all, any help we can get from the outside would be vastly appreciated." He nodded at Jerrodby. "Right as rain, and decent of you to come, sir."

Jerrodby flushed in discomfort. "Afraid I can't give much help, General Barton. Sir Henry's given me the details. I might just look with him—"

General Barton gestured a hand. "The garrison is at your disposal, sir.—You see, I know of you. I've read some of your volumes on criminology. Fact is, one of them is right here in my library."

JERRODBY turned to inspect the bookshelves, nervously tapping his eyeglass on his chin. Sir Henry paced the floor at the general's elbow.

"Your men are examining the cannons, general?"

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"As you directed. They've gone over the two lower galleries," the officer explained, "but there's a gun about every twelve paces, and they're planted all over the Rock, so they can't have covered half of them yet. But the adjutant made a discovery this morning. The powder used to explode those old guns was stolen from the ammunition dump in this garrison. Nobody could determine when."

"Maybe a year ago?" Sir Henry wanted to know.

"Maybe ten. And never missed until this check-up. I've had my staff on the carpet this morning, too. They left just before you came in. Meantime, the War Office has cabled the description of that man you wanted."

The inspector reached for the proffered envelope with alacrity, tore out the message, began to read aloud:

"Allen Watters Harris, Lieutenant Punjab Horse Artillery. Born in Bedford (1869); educated Brasenose College, Oxford; Sandhurst. Entered service Bombay, India (1895). Wanted for desertion, robbery and murder, Peshawar (1899). Distinguishing marks: light blue eyes, chestnut hair, medium height. Expert horseman and cricket player. Known as heavy plunger on games—the reason given for his homicide, intent to rob. Further particulars unobtainable.

"You see," Sir Henry made clear to Jerrodby, "we're still on the theory that this man, Harris, might have come back out of the past and murdered these three."

"A devilish thin thread," the general snarled. "That description might apply to almost any young officer in those days. The man would be around sixty now. And thirty years changes a man."

"Indeed it does!" Jerrodby agreed.

Sir Henry pocketed this meager report. "Of course, that was the point made by Perseus and Jackson. Harris wouldn't be recognized. Yes—and going under an alias, perhaps disguised. And there are about four thousand Tommies stationed here."

"None of whom saw service in India at any time, according to their records," the general supplemented. "As for the officers, I know them personally, to a man. Many of them are just out of England, not a few were with me in France, and with Allenby in Palestine. Colonel Outram and his wife, and Majors Jackson and Perseus, happen to be the only ones in the post who were ever in the Orient. It's disgraceful to examine these men. Yet—"

"Somebody committed those murders, wrote those two notes, fired those guns." The inspector mopped his temples. "Somebody on the *inside*. Some one familiar with Gibraltar."

In the outer office phones rang and boots tramped. Heat swam through the window blinds, striping the floor with yellow. Somewhere a bugle trilled a quick, brassy summons, and hobnails clattered on the paving outside. In the distant harbor a steamer siren voiced a funneling *whoom!*

"Mess!" the general snapped. "We won't go to the general mess—we'll have tea here in private."

He clapped his palms. The door opened, admitting the Hindu servant. Something glimmered in his fingers.

"Tea here," General Barton rasped. "We don't want to be disturbed."

The old servant bowed. "I have found the General Sahib's spectacles."

SMILING his irritation, the commander pinched the glasses to his nose. Immediately his face assumed age and an appearance of

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scholasticism, behind the thick lenses. His near-sighted eyes gave Jerrodby a nervous stare.

"Care for tea? There's whisky and cognac on that shelf behind you—"

Jerrodby was plucking a vellum-bound book from an opened case.

"Tea, thanks," he answered. "By the way, Sir Henry tells me you're an astronomer as well as a historian.—Incidentally, you don't happen to be an authority on Louis the Sixteenth of France?"

"Strange of you to say that," the general growled. "I've just been reading his life. The book you have there."

"Ah!"

Jerrodby inspected the title—"Louis XVI"—riffled the pages, then returned the volume to the shelf. He saw that Sir Henry was watching him in puzzled annoyance. "I merely wondered if the French under Louis Sixteenth hadn't laid siege on Gibraltar, here," Jerrodby said. "Food. Here's the tea."

Noiseless, unobtrusive, the Hindustani batman was gravely serving the steaming cups. Unused to British-trained servitors, Jerrodby was fascinated by the deft brown fingers. When the old man returned to the service table, the little American chuckled.

"We don't have servants like that in the States."

"They don't have servants like Gungoo anywhere," General Barton declared. "The man's priceless. He can do anything from making a pair of boots to repairing a typewriter or finding my damned glasses."

"By Jove, it never occurred to me!" Sir Henry's voice was low. "Isn't that old beggar from India, too?"

"Why, of course. But he— You can't think he—?"

"Might remember a face," the inspector whispered. "These Hindus are—"

"He wouldn't know a thing," the general muttered. "Fellow was with me in Egypt—far back as I can recall. And I—"

Sir Henry was looking at his watch. "I say," he interposed. "Just about this time yesterday, Major Jackson was killed. Look here, general, I hate to say it, but I'm not satisfied with Major Perseus's alibi. About being in that wine room, I mean. Would the major be off duty now?"

"He won't have gone to mess yet. The man always takes a constitutional at this hour. Lord, though, I hate to question him again. He's already almost sick from this thing.—I won't send an orderly for him. He isn't far, and I'll fetch him myself."

"Good," Sir Henry nodded. "He can check this description of Harris with us. I've just had an idea."

Stiffly, the old commander reached for his helmet. There was a faint jingle of spurs as his polished boots crossed the floor, and with a worried nod he left by the rear door. Tucking his glass in his eye, Jerrodby turned a surprised gaze on his companion. Jerrodby would never forget those ensuing, drowsy two or three minutes; the figure of the Hindu servant, back turned, at the window blind; Sir Henry sitting there, eyes fixed on the cup balanced on his knee; the whir of the overhead fan and the mumble of the outer office.

Finally he touched his friend's sleeve. "You've found something?"

The inspector's glance wandered toward the figure at the window, then swiveled back to catch Jerrodby's eye.

"Merely an idea," he grumbled softly, muting his speech, "that Perseus knows more than he tells. Because

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yesterday, when we brought him here, he jumped at the sight of this Hindu."

"And I can give you something to jump at, I think," whispered the little American, over the rim of his cup, "when I tell you I've an idea how those cannons were fired in daylight. And as for Harris—"

Jerrodby's words were stopped short in his mouth by a reverberating *crash!* A blast that filled the outdoors with violent thunder; that smashed the noon hour into a yelling din, rattled the window blinds and, shivering the air in that stunned headquarters room, had Jerrodby pouring his tea across his lap, and brought General Barton rushing wild-eyed from the rear exit.

"Great God! What was that? I hadn't left the building—washing up a bit. It smashed the bathroom window back there, and—"

The ringing alarm of the desk phone drilled through the blatter. Then the receiver palsied in the general's hand, and he whirled from the desk with sweat beading out on his stricken face, lips shouting.

"Another cannon!—Gallery above here! Major Perseus! *Major Perseus was just killed!*"

CHAPTER III.

GHOST KILLER.

THE echo of that cannon-shot went ricochetting through tunnels and galleries and up the cloven cliffs of mountainous rock, to dissolve in a faint, far volley among the unseen modern batteries under the sky. A growing roar of voices made an answering undertone. Jerrodby had an impression of a vast beehive kicked suddenly awake on a summer's afternoon. On the heels of the general and Sir Henry Macklington he ran through the building into a pall of dust on a pavement where khaki figures waved and pointed, shouting. Officers darted, collided with each other, and cursed. A soldier straddled a motorcycle, his mouth open. A forgotten horse reared and frothed.

Men poured from a near-by canteen with mess kits in their hands. Sentries came running with swinging guns. Mouths shouted frightened oaths, and a turmoil of men started across the drill field. All eyes were on a jutting cliff overhead, where a haze of black smoke roiled against blue sky.

"It's 'appened again!"—"Murder!"—"Somebody's got it!"—"Th' killer! Th' bleedin' killer's struck!" "It's 'im, lads! It's th' *ghost*—"

Squalling sergeants, lieutenants, a scarlet-faced captain fisted and struck among the men. Hats and gear rolled on the cobbles under trampling boots. Officers screamed for o r d e r, and Tommy Atkins cursed back and floundered in heightened confusion. M. P.'s drove into them with clubs, shrilling police whistles, bowling. But fear was on the garrison and a ghost death haunted the Rock. These stout-hearted Tommies from Lancashire, Devon and Londontown could face a cannonade from Germans on the Somme; but the voice of a dead gun, speaking from p a s t generations, was something else again. They could see the floury whiteness of the general's face, and fear caught them all like some contagious plague.

"Back, men!—Keep back! To your posts!"

Whistles blowing. Leather lungs bellowing c o m m a n d s. The little American stood in dust and uproar, baffled in this foreign confusion and half blinded by his rush out into the

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blazing dayshine. He watched a squad of men come galloping down a flight of stone steps from the cliff above—like lunatics coming down a fire escape chiseled on the face of the escarpment. High in a precipice above this lower ledge, men were midgets gesturing and hallooing over a lofty railing of stone. Above the storm of outcries, General Barton's voice shouted rapid, savage orders:

"Major Emory! Get those men into barracks! Clear this field.—Back! All of them! Keep them away from that gallery!—Everybody! You, Captain Smith! Get the anti-aircraft battery on the wire! Tell Captain Blair-Keith to assemble his men and keep them on the firing station up there! Call the guards on the west and south stations. All guards stand by for orders. Quickly! No lagging now!—Get the police on the wire! Stand by!"

Orders snapping like pistol shots. Men leaping to attention. A corporal rushing through dust, panting, waving a fist, a sweat-greased face ducking and bobbing to the fore.

"It's Major Perseus, sir, like I reported. Got to him six seconds after the shot! I didn't see it. But he was takin' his walk, sir—like 'e allus does at noon. On that gallery up there.—It's th' cannon up there, sir!"

"Blown to ribbons!" came another shout. "I seen 'im, too. Looked right down on 'im! He's *up* there, now!—Oh, my God!"

"Nobody around!" screamed a third. "That gun just sittin' there smokin', an' Major Perseus covered wiv blood, an' his *face*—"

THEY were running. Jerrodby and the general and the inspector; sprinting over cobblestones through the milling men. Running behind four guardsmen who beckoned and snarled in the lead. Behind them on the drill field, the garrison was quieting into a semblance of order; but on the cliffs above, tiny voices hailed, signal flags wigwagged on little balconies, and there was a faint bugling.

Jerrodby had no time to discover just where they were going; he lost all sense of direction in a labyrinth of passageways, granite stairways and iron gates. As far as he could tell, they were climbing Gibraltar by an inside corridor which had been tunneled in the rock; a corridor dark as the stairway of an old tower. Walls and stones dank with age; sudden balconies open to the sky, with the sea pounding and creaming down the cliff far below; a passageway lighted dim green by narrow gunports cut like windows in the sidewall, and a passing glimpse of ancient cannon decaying in moldy gunpits.

It was not a long climb, but he was puffing fiercely when they emerged from a tunnel and fled across an open gallery, high under the sky. Somehow, he had not expected this picture. The broad, hundred-foot ledge with the frowning gray cliffs going up and up to a towering lookout station on one hand; on the other, the thick stone railing overlooking a horizon of blue sea. Darting to the railing, he could look down on the garrison, the field and barracks, two hundred feet below, the rooftops of the town sloping to the foreshore far below that; and beyond, a magnificent view of the harbor and its shipping, with the tall masts of schooners and steamers like toys on the painted bay, and a distant glimpse of Spain—the Mediterranean—sweeping blue.

But he had no moment for sight-

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seeing. At the far end of the gallery, a group of Tommies stood with heads bared to the sun, eyes transfixed on a jabberwock figure smeared bleeding on the gallery floor. Floor, cliff wall and railing were spattered crimson, as if some prankish hand had scattered a can of red paint. Wind sweeping out of the sky played with the dead man's white hair and carried a scent of scorched metal and powder burns.

"I warned 'im," the corporal was gurgling. "I warned 'im when 'e walked by us, where we was changing guard in that corridor down below. 'E allus comes up 'ere to take 'is noonhour stroll all by 'imself; a regular 'abit of the major's, like. Wouldn't go to tiffin till 'e'd been up 'ere for 'is breath of air.—'There's that gun up there on the gallery,' I says. 'And it ain't been hinspected yet,' I says. Gives me a scowl, 'e does. 'I don't believe in your bloody ghosts,' 'e says, 'and if I catch any man lurking around that gun while *I'm* up there, I'll dashed well empty my Webley into 'im,' 'e says."

But Major Edwin E. H. Perseus had not so much as drawn his Webley. The automatic pistol was secure in the holster buckled to the dead man's belt. He had been thrown to his back, arms wide, by the shrapnel-like blast that had riddled his chest with slag, had broken his neck and crushed his face. The mutilated features were a-glitter with blood, imbedded iron fragments and particles of colored glass.

"Gad!" Sir Henry gasped out. "Another charge of junk. Loaded with rubbish from some dump heap."

A SULLEN muttering ran through the men grouped around the corpse as the general and the inspector darted forward. Lingering back, the little American criminologist sped a swift eye over the scene; glared at the sky; stared up the towering cliffside. The sun was a blatant fireball coming over the crest of the Rock in the full blaze of noon, dispelling all shadow on that high ramp. That unforgiving stare bathed the face of the dead man, where he lay in blood, and glinted in blinding reflections on the barrel of the antique bronze cannon mounted on the ramparts at the gallery's end. Any one on the gallery might have been felled by the spewing cannon-blast, for the gun pointed straight up the walkway, the muzzle trained at the entrance.

He caught the general's arm. "Was the gun always pointed like this?"

"Ever since the old days," was the general's shaky answer. "Attacking pirates would chase the gunners up here, and the gunners would get behind that cannon and let the devils have it as they came up from below. Sort of a last resort for the defenders. These galleries don't go any higher.—God! Major Perseus was walking right into it—*right toward it!*"

"It must have been some one he knew!" Sir Henry gritted. "Some one up here waiting for him! But there's only one entry to this gallery! No other way to get up here, by Heaven, unless this murderer comes in a plane out of the sky."

"Out of the sky," Jerrodby echoed, staring at the zenith. "Great Scott!"

He yanked his cuff for a look at his wrist watch; then hurriedly skirted the knot of soldiers and stepped toward the gun.

Smoke crept from a rent such as a monstrous can opener might have torn in the ancient barrel, crawling in gray worms from the blackened mouth. The explosion had torn the culverin from

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its crumbled moorings, so that it lay on its side, not unlike a giant firecracker, slowly fuming. The granite base had cracked like a block of ice, and a dark aperture the size of a manhole yawned in the rock-slabbed floor of the gunpit. Staring at this hole in astonishment, Jerrodby realized that the soldiers behind him were pointing and shouting.

"Caved in!" a Cockney was yelling. "Must have broke through from the jolt when the gun blew off!"

General Barton's choked cry. "Why, it looks like a passage!"

"Down through the cliff!" another blurted. "We never spied it till after th' corporal took th' guard down to fetch you, sir!"

"What the devil!"

"Right down through th' Rock, sir.—There's stone steps!"

"A bleedin' secret tunnel from the old days."

"So!" Sir Henry pounded a fist on his palm, leaping into the gunpit. "*That's* how the killer gets around to these guns and fades away.—Old stone door fallen in! Look, by gad!"

General Barton roared: "You men, go down in that thing! See where it leads to. I want a man from the engineers corps.—Lights. Ropes. Why didn't you follow?"

"Sergeant Shane went down already!" one of the Tommies pointed. "Took two men with him, sir. Ordered us to stay behind till you arrived! They said the air was good, sir—"

IT was like the entrance to a tomb, or the opening into a pyramid a thousand feet in the sky. Jerrodby stared down into the cobwebby hole that was like a caved-in grave behind the exploded gun. Sunlight crept down a flight of crooked, crumbled steps that disappeared in well-bottom darkness; age and fust, and a dank wind out of a thousand forgotten years, gusted from this narrow throat in the rock and made the little American's spine crawl. Its ancient breath filled the gunpit, worse than powder fumes.

But it was a card he hadn't expected to find in this addled puzzle; and he turned from the bewildered man, leaped on the gun-mountings and bent to inspect the touch-hole in the swollen breech. Smoke still dribbled from the powder chamber; the hole, blackened by a recoiling discharge, was large enough to admit a lead pencil. He was glad the men in the gunpit weren't looking his way. Certainly he appeared to be half mad, squatting on that cracked granite gun base, inspecting the cracks, with his monocle close to the stone. Bolts, bottle glass, nails had blown the length of the gallery; but it was near the breech of the cannon where he found the scrap he was looking for, and a sharp oath cut through his teeth as he dusted the bright fragment into a handkerchief and tucked the find into his pocket.

Dimly, he heard the men about him, the scrape of hobnails, clicking speech. Sir Henry's savage words, directed at the general, were:

"And we'll find him, sir! Just trace through this secret passage; and where it comes out, I say, we're going to find this murderer!"

The men growling in undertones and the general snapping, "If that sergeant isn't back in one more minute— Somebody's down there!"

"They're coming back up, sir!"

Jerrodby swung away from the gun to join Sir Henry, who was kneeling over the hole in the pit. Excited faces, mouthing, sweating, grouped at the jagged tunnel mouth. General Barton

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mopping his throat with a nervous hand, bending stiffly to look down, gray eyes winking fiercely behind the myopic glasses.

A trampling, stumbling noise blundering in echo out of the black well below. Cupping his palms, the old commander shouted:

"Below there! That you, Sergeant Shane?"

"Coming up directly!" was the subterranean halloo. Dust pooled in the dimness below. A glimmer of deep light touched narrow tunnel walls; flared out. Shoulders and upturned faces mounted out of blackness; a sergeant and two men in khaki leaped up the steps to stand, hard-eyed, panting, crowding the gunpit.

"Where does it lead?" General Barton snarled.

The big sergeant's cheeks labored with quickened breath. Sweat ran on his corded neck and clamped jaws, and his eyeballs were savage under the dusty visor of his military cap. Jerrodby Sparrow elbowed back on the fringe of the group and saw with a shock that the non-com was leveling a pistol at the commander's head.

"It goes straight down the cliff and into the wall!" The sergeant's voice was a rasp through gritted teeth. "Comes out in a bougainvillæa bush, general. That's w h e r e the tunnel ends. Right by the back door of *your* house!"

COLOR washed from the general's cheek bones. A whistly gasp escaped the Tommies behind him; in the windy sunshine the sergeant leaned at his commanding officer, his mouth spitting the words in syllables of hot metal.

"You heard me, General Barton? That there secret passage leads down to th' back o' your quarters, an' these lads with me seen it, too."

The men at his side nodded emphatically. "That's right," one of them glowered. "Leads right to th' Old Man's house! We seen it orl right!"

"That's so," echoed the other, stamping mold from his boots. "We seen it!"

Jerrodby's glance, skipping from face to face, saw the narrowing eyes, lips wrenched and drawn back, square-cut British jaws congealing like concrete into a dangerous mask. Sir Henry's stout countenance strained thin across the temples in horrified dismay; muscles corded in the old general's throat, and blue veins came out on his forehead. Then his voice broke in a roar.

"You mean *me?* Your superior officer? The commander of Gibraltar?—You dare intimate that *I—?*"

He was raging, agued, both fists knotted and shaking above his head. They shook down the storm. Tempest broke under the blue. An explosion of fierce words, oaths.

"'Twas *'im* who d o n e it!"—"That's right, lads!"—"Ghost killer? Ha, ha, ha! Th' bleedin' fiend, 'e is!"—"Sneakin' around th' old Rock in 'is secret passages!"

"Who else?" the sergeant screamed. "Who else? How about it, Scotland Yard? Ain't it true you been sayin' it's some one those as was murdered would trust? Didn't you say it was a man they'd never be suspicious of supposin' he was standin' by the gun-breech? Who else but the commander-in-chief of the Gibraltar garrison? Yah! The general could do it! Who'd suspect the general?—Creepin' around an' murderin' his under officers! Blowin' the head off that *woman!*"

The general screamed, whirling at

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the Tommies. "Put that sergeant under arrest! Drop those guns, you insubordinate scoundrels! — What? Is this mutiny? Mutiny? Call the guard! Damn you, get!"

But this wasn't G. H. Q. This wasn't the drill field. This was a lonely balcony far up the face of a cliff, a gun-pit with a wizardish gape in its floor, a cannon broken from its deadly shot. There was the blood-spattered ramp, and the silent corpse of murder, and discipline cracking to frenzy under the strain. Harsh words lashed out from the men; above the general's screaming burst the voice of the non-com.

"It ain't mutiny! No mutiny to 'andle a murderer. Can't get away, neither; an' yer can scream yer bloody 'ead off with nobody to hear but us. Hey, lads? We'll show G. H. Q. 'ow good soldiers take care o' killers!— General, are you? Get away with murder, can you? Not this time, you can't!"

"No, no!" Sir Henry lunged forward; was thrown back by a stabbing elbow. "Keep out!" the sergeant shouted at him. "You ain't in this! Keep yer mouth shut, too! Them murdered men was *our* officers! That there passage leads to this blighter's door, don't it? Didn't we hear you say where th' secret passage come out we'd find th' murderer?"

CROWDED by khaki shoulders, the general swayed against the ramp.

"All right! Take me below, then! Let's have it out—"

"Below, hell!" was the sergeant's snarl. "You won't have *that* chance to git clear. Think you can git away with it, hey? Pull th' wool because you're th' high command, eh? Not this time, Sir Douglas Barton!"

"Give 'im what's comin' to 'im, sarge!"

"Let th' killer 'ave it!"

The big non-com drove his gun into the general's midriff. "There'll be no such disgrace on Gibraltar, or I'm damned! These 'ere men are soldiers up to the hilt, an' we ain't goin' to spread no scandal on this post! Over th' wall, you're goin'! Over th' wall, where we'll say you've fell—"

Sir Henry's sudden charge was stopped by a Tommy's swinging gun. Floundering bodies trampling in the gun pit. Dust clouding in the wind. Oaths and grunts. The animal snarling of maddened men. In the moil of outgrabbing hands the general spun like a stuffed dummy; his hat went whirling across the ramp; his face, veined crimson and purple, tossing like a cabbage in the khaki swirl. It was only a second in the rush; the sergeant's outstriking pistol missed the gray-thatched head.

But the general was down, toppling with a sudden, strangled cry, as if a band had tightened on his throat, and tumbling to the floor with his hands grabbing air and his eyes rolled to whites in his face.

But they had forgotten Jerrodby. Charging from the dead major's side, he came around the corner of the cannon and sprang into the gun pit with the murdered officer's Webley in his fist.

"Back, you fools! I'll kill the first one to lift a gun! Get the general, Sir Henry! I'll hold these dogs!"

"It's a bleedin' Yank!"

"What's *he* doin' up here?"

"Out th' way, Yank, or you won't feel so shirty! Killed three officers, this bloody general did, an' a woman, too. Blowed 'em wiv cannon—"

"Get that blighter outa there! Who's *'e*, buttin' *in?*"

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"I'm the Law!" Jerrodby heard himself shouting. "Keep back!"

THE khaki mass shimmered in yellow waves before his sweat-glazed eyeglass. A swaying cordon of bunched bodies and weaving faces. He couldn't hold them. The mass boiled, coming at him from ten directions, yelling. Dodging, he struck a scalp of black hair, cracked a chin with his swinging pistol. Sir Henry was backed against the gun-mountings, battling with the guard corporal. Fighting in the heart of the brawl, the little American struggled to beat through a wedge of arms and reach the inspector. Gang fight! Flailing knuckles! Stamping and swinging through a chorus of oaths that made a tiny bedlam under the vast blue. Fatal to start shooting. The men didn't know what they were doing. Blood-maddened men, fevered with rage, battling to get a murderer. A pile-up of arms, fists and heads.

The horizon wheeled in Jerrodby's eye. A glimpse of far ocean. A glimpse of the cliffs overhead. Like battling in an eagle's nest.—*Ping!* There was his eyeglass, powdered under heel. His vision swam. A gun-butt streaked whistling past his nose, crashed hard on his wrist, sent his pistol flying. Khaki forms lunged at him through hot mist. Struggling in arms that wore a sergeant's chevrons, he was pitched over backwards; went tripping across the boots of the prostrate general. Scalding flame seemed to be splintering his forearm to the elbow, and his jump to avoid trampling General Barton's face sent him spinning into Sir Henry, in a collision that drove a gasp from the inspector's stomach.

"An' now keep out of this!" the sergeant squalled.

"Keep out of it yourself!"

The somber warning seemed an echo from nowhere on the gallery. The Tommies whirled on heel. The sergeant leaped about-face.

A turbanned head lifted slowly from the hole in the gun pit floor. The thin, brown face was a skull in parchment, as the jet eyes swept the gallery and settled on the collapsed general. The Enfield in the old Hindu's fists menaced the blanched troopers. Rifle leveled, he climbed from the shadowy tunnel mouth.

"I saw the sergeant come out of the bushes down below. I saw him disappear. I followed." The voice was a deadly monotone. "The soldiers have injured the general *sahib*. If he dies, they die—by the word of Gungoo Lal! If the inspector *sahib* and the American *sahib* will carry the general from the gallery, I will hold these mutineers—"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROCK CARRIES ON.

LOOKING back, Jerrodby Sparrow could never quite remember how the old Hindu got them out of there. Dragging the limp garrison commander between them, the little American and the frantic inspector raced up the gallery, past the slaughtered major, and pounded for the corridor descending to the tunnels and galleries in the labyrinth below. Gunfire snapped like corn in a hot pan behind them, a sudden spate of bullets chipping the rocks under their heels.

Over his shoulder Jerrodby caught a glimpse of the pursuit. Not to be stopped by a mere foreign batman, the furious Tommies had tackled the Hindu with the ferocity of charg-

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ing wolves; but Gungoo had made an acrobat's leap to evade the rush, and was bounding like a monkey, covering the retreat with his hammering Enfield. Firing wildly, the Tommies spilled across the gallery in a mad chase. In the confinement of the lower corridor, the crash of gunnery made an ear-splitting din.

"Quick!" The Hindu dashed to take the lead. "This way! Follow me, *sahibs*, lest they kill us all. To the old signal station—"

It was touch-and-go, with hot lead crooning in that inner dusk of the corridor. Darting around blind corners. Galloping across open stone spans. Playing hare and hounds on the crust of that towering mountain. The general was a straw man; his heavy head lolled on Jerrodby's shoulder; his dragging boot-heels thumped and bumped on the path. Breath and profanity gusted from Sir Henry's nose; the ponderous inspector was having a time of it. Once again, the little American lost all sense of direction in the maze of twists and turns. But the Hindu seemed to know his way, leaping ahead, up one gallery, down the next. "This way, *sahibs*. We leave them behind!"

He had flung aside his emptied rifle; now he stooped to carry the general's feet. Bunched together, they ran through a dim tunnel lined with cannon; and the chase had faded to echoes when they rounded a bend, staggered out into the streaming sunshine, azure sky, on an open, stone-flanked bastion, high on a buttressed wall. The outlook swept to far horizon, mapped with the tenuous coastline of Spain. It was like looking down from an airplane. Garrison and town were nowhere in view; but far below, the bastion surf creamed among giant bowlders, and the crying of bugles made thin brass threads of sound, somewhere in the distance. Jerrodby thought of a line from Kipling—"with a drop into nothing below them, as far as a beggar could spit"—there was something about great heights that watered his blood.

It was high, up there. A pair of hawks flew screaming from their perch on the barrel of a massive iron cannon that squatted sullenly in its pit, centered in the bastion. Its rusty mouth was covered with a cloth of spider-webs; the muzzle pointed toward a broad porthole in the thick outer wall. Once, in forgotten history, the colossal culverin had fired stone cannonballs like thunderbolts through that embrasure, to smash the decks of galleons far below. Cannonballs were still piled in a mound under the gun's blunt nose, each ball fastened to the other by rusty chain. Birds had nested in the stone mountings, and pale eggshells lay broken among the iron links.

"LAY him there," the Hindu groaned, pointing at a strip of shade under the cannon-barrel. "By the Oath of the Cow, if my master has been killed—"

Tears came leaking down the old man's face.

"Is he dead?"

Sir Henry's tone was vibrant with unstrung emotion.

Bending over the officer's rigid face, Jerrodby shook his head.

"Not dead. Unconscious. Like a stroke. The shock—"

"Those brutes!" the inspector swore.

"They didn't hit him. The shock felled him. Looks like an ictus. A sort of catalepsy. Brought on by extreme excitement or sudden strain.

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Why didn't you take us back to the garrison?" the little American flung at the Hindu. "To headquarters? He needs medical—"

"The soldiers were running that way, *sahib*. They would have overtaken us and killed him. Now they have lost us, and they will run on down to the drill ground, where the officers will control them." He dropped to his knees, making a grab to pick up the general's glasses from the rim of the gun pit where they had fallen. "My master would not like to lose these. He looks badly, *sahib*."

A nauseous green tinted the unconscious man's cheek. His stertorous breathing stirred the wings of his white mustache. Jerrodby put an arm under the sagging shoulders, closed the damp eyelids over the glassy, staring eyes.

"A dangerous business," he advised the inspector. "May take hours to waken him out of it. Men subject to cataleptic—"

We must carry him, then, at once to safety." The Hindu was trembling, eyes black under the turban. "If the officer from Scotland Yard would run to the gunport, yonder, and wave his white handkerchief, he could attract attention of soldiers in signal station at base of cliff—"

"Why didn't you say so before?" Yanking for his handkerchief, the inspector sprang for the embrasure and leaned far out to look down. In that moment, when the Englishman's shoulders were framed in that porthole, something clicked like a rocket in the back of Jerrodby Sparrow's brain. In a flash he had dropped the general to his face, whipped to his feet, thrown himself head-down at the stalwart Sir Henry's legs.

"*Look out!*"

With not a second to spare, the inspector and the little American rolled heels over head, howling, under the gun-barrel.

On that following second-tick, there was a crash that shook down the sky in booming rataplans of thunder. Flame volcanoed from the culverin's mouth—*wham!* A livid ball whistled squarely through the gunport, soared smoking across the blue, and fell through sunshine like a dropping comet. The balcony shook like an earthquake. Stones came chattering down the cliff overhead. A tiny geyser burst from mirrored water, far out to sea.

IN a stifling pall of black smoke, Jerrodby bounced to his feet; cleared the base of that cannon with a leap that tore ligaments in his legs.

"The Hindu! *He* did it! I saw him lay those glasses there! Get him!"

His fingers just missed the mess jacket, ripping the hem. The old creature was a ghost in the smoke. He whirled like a dervish, and, before Jerrodby could stop him, sprang around the gun and got to the embrasure. A moment his skinny figure was poised in wizardish outline against the sky, his arms waving in a queer windmill motion, eyes glowing like fanned coals, mouth wailing words that smote Jerrodby to stone where he stood and rooted the inspector by his heels.

"I did it! I did it! I killed them, *sahibs*—all four of them. I, Gungoo Lal, slew them—and the Hindu never lies when he is dying, *sahibs*. I do not lie. They were wicked and destroyed my master, the *Feringi* I loved as a father loves his son. They destroyed him, *sahibs;* killed his good name;

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killed his name and robbed him of his reason, so that his soul departed his body and he never again could know who he was. For days he lay as you see him lying now, and I took him away and cared for him. But he forgot. Only Gungoo Lal did not forget —and Gungoo Lal has paid the debt for him who was despoiled; has paid the debt for him who was master and friend—"

He was gone. He salaamed, stepped backwards. Then he wasn't there. Clutching the ramp with wet fingers, neck craned over that dizzy precipice, Jerrodby could see the figure falling, dropping down and down, smaller and smaller, dwindling to a figurine that turned woodenly in midair. Near the bottom the turban tore free and floated, circling slowly like an awkward bird. Then a waterspout rose up the cliffside, and the surface of the tide smoothed over.

Bugles were tenoring again. Sir Henry reeled back from the ramp, wiping his forehead with his fingers.

"Gad!" was the most that he said.

From the inert figure lying face up under the cannon-barrel there came a moan. Jerrodby knelt quickly to catch the man's pale wrist. The general's lips were moving, whispering the mumbo-jumbo of dreams; but Jerrodby held up a hand for silence, stooping to catch the words.

"What are you four doing in this tent?" It was weird to hear in the daylight, this whisper from the mind of sleep. "What is it, and—? By Heaven, that captain is dead!—Mary! Mary! Good God, Mary, what are you doing with my knife?"

The lips moaned, went silent. Muscles relaxed about the white mouth. Jerrodby creaked up from aching knees; he faced the inspector.

"He'll be all right now. He's coming to. They always dream when they're coming out of it. Queer thing, how the mind reverts—turns back thirty years. But he won't remember when he wakes up; he'll come back in the same amnesia. No use telling him, Sir Henry. The debt's been paid, by the looks. I suppose Mary was the name of Colonel Outram's wife?"

"AND so," Jerrodby went on to explain, when he and Sir Henry Macklington sat once again in the little tap room on Waterport Street where the inspector had started the story in daylight and the little American criminologist was now ending it in twilight, and with a smile, "and so General Sir Douglas Barton and your man Harris were one and the same man, all the time. Somehow, I had a hunch when you told me something of the general's service record. About him joining as a Tommy in Egypt and getting commissioned after a few weeks of fighting. That looked as if he'd had military training before. Not that he knew it, though. His hands and feet would have maneuvered out of habit, but his mind didn't remember. He couldn't recall a thing, you understand. His past and his personality as Harris were completely wiped out. A blank."

"My word, Jerrodby!" the inspector husked. "Think of it! All these years! Never knew his real identity—never remembered who he was!"

"Exactly!" said Jerrodby. "As the poor Hindu expressed it, the soul had departed his body. I imagine Gungoo thought his master was mad, but General Barton isn't mad. It's a plain case of fixed amnesia. Complete loss of memory. Not as unusual as you might believe. There are people wan-

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dering all over the face of the earth—amnesia victims never recalling their names, sometimes—as in the general's case. Not even conscious of their forgotten past. The mind is an extremely delicate mechanism, Sir Henry. We've scarcely scratched the surface in the study of it."

He paused to turn the wine glass in his fingers, watching coruscations of light play in the stem.

"What happened back there—thirty years ago in India—is plain enough. The general told us, talking in his sleep, to-day. When that cannon-blast brought him out of shock up there, his mind, struggling to consciousness, had a flash of the past. Just a whispering dream—his subconscious going back to the last thing that happened to him before his loss of memory. I can see it, all right. Harris, the young lieutenant, blundering into that scene of murder in the tent. He sees the three officers standing around the body, maybe robbing the pay money. There's the girl—his fiancée—with the red knife—*his* knife—in her fist. Something snaps in his brain. Shock, again. Probably the same sort of thing that happened to him to-day. He faints, falls over."

"Good God!"

"I imagine Gungoo followed his young master into the tent. Faithful fellow. He grabs up young Harris, seeing the situation only too well, and carries his master off. There's a battle going on. Under cover of the turmoil he escapes with Harris and hits over the border. Harris must have taken a long time to recover. Sick, probably. You remember the Hindu's words: 'For days he lay as you see him lying now'?"

"And that faithful servant took care of him," Sir Henry murmured.

"There it is.—And when Harris came out of it he couldn't remember a thing. I suppose Gungoo told him some trumped-up story, said he'd been ill; smoothed it over; told him his name was Douglas Barton. The police were after Harris, you recall, and Gungoo did everything to hide him and save him. The Hindu loved his master, and when those four double-crossers declared Harris a murderer, old Gungoo probably swore then and there to kill the lot of them. Meantime, his master had to work, and so he rejoined the army in Egypt."

"Ending up in Gibraltar as a famous soldier and a credit to his king."

"His Hindu batman still by his side, too. Well, Outram and his wife, and Jackson and Perseus, coming face to face with them after thirty years, never recognized them. Mustache and glasses alter a face. The Hindu had altered, too. But sharp-eyed Gungoo recognized his old enemies at once. And promptly set about paying that old debt. Nobody's fool, that Hindu servant. Brought up in his master's library. That's how he figured out how to shoot those ancient guns."

"DAMN it, man, how?"

"Well, the first clues I got out of the case were these. Cannons firing off by themselves. Daylight. Nobody there. No trace of a cannoneer. Victims apparently walking right into the mouths of the guns.—Obviously the guns weren't fired by any cannoneer, then. How were they fired? By a mechanism."

"Only there wasn't any mechanism," the inspector growled in bewilderment. "You mean to say that the Hindu didn't creep up that secret tunnel—?"

"I don't think any one in present-

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day Gibraltar knew about that tunnel. He broke in just by accident; didn't have anything to do with it. A mechanism fired that cannon, and from those other guns, only we couldn't find it. Did you ever hear, Sir Henry, of a cannon clock?"

Sir Henry declared he had never heard of a cannon clock.

"Biggest clock in the world," Jerrodby smiled, "and always on time, and right smack over our heads. The sun. That's what fired those cannons—the sun. All that old Gungoo had to do was load the guns under cover, and sit back and wait. He wouldn't be under suspicion. He could ram the charge down the barrel when nobody was around and stuff the chamber with his stolen powder. All right. He knew exactly the time Major Perseus took his walk on the gallery. He knew the hour and minute of the day when Major Jackson walked from that certain tunnel for the post office mail.

"It was easy enough to lure Colonel and Mrs. Outram to their destruction. And he figured out the exact time at which the sun would reach down Gibraltar's cliffs and fall on the breech of those certain cannons. The astronomy and mathematics he could find in his master's library, or from the heliograph charts and almanacs. That, also, is where he got his clock cannon idea. History. Louis Sixteenth invented one, and it used to fire off by itself at the exact moment of noon in Paris. I happened to remember it, that was all. A cannon fired by a burning glass, set over the touch-hole."

"A burning glass!"

"Yes, and you told me the general was invariably losing his spectacles.—Old Gungoo, that was why. Taking those thick-lensed glasses and grinding a lens down to fit over the touch-hole of a cannon. Believe me, I almost fell over when I found a tiny piece of optical glass near that gun on the topmost gallery. I know optical glass, Sir Henry. I'm always breaking my own monocle. Lord! And then I was sure the general was the murderer. But Harris was described as having blue eyes, and the commander's were gray. Of course eyes do change color when one gets older—but it's rare.

"Anyway, General Barton *was* Harris—but Gungoo was the hand of revenge. And he fired those guns with Gibraltar as the sun dial and optical glass to explode the powder. Naturally, the backfire would blow the glass from the touch-hole and thus hide *that* clue, too.

"But he almost killed you, Sir Henry, when he put those spectacles on the gun-breach, there at the last. Still trying to hide his master from harm."

THE little American stood up and reached out a hand. "And now I've got to catch that liner—"

Sir Henry smiled grimly.

"I told you you were the smartest detective I know. You've completely wrecked my ego, Jerrodby. Gad! But thank the Lord it's over. The old Rock will carry on, and all that. You think General Barton will be—?"

"He'll be fine. Stout-hearted old officer, all right. He'll never remember his past as Harris, though. But he wasn't in this last catalepsy long enough to forget his identity as General Barton. I'd never tell him about the Harris part of it, either. He wouldn't believe it—and the thing is squared. You're going to tell him that Gungoo fell off the bastion?"

"Right!" the inspector whispered thickly. "The Hindu did his part."

THE END.

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Jack realized that these were the fugitive half-breeds

Buckshot

By W. C. TUTTLE

Fugitives from the law are sometimes less deadly than the men who seek them, Irish O'Shea learned in that range feud

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

IRISH O'SHEA and Noisy Waters, wandering cowboys, were heading for Paint Pot Valley in search of work when they discovered a skeleton beside the trail. It appeared that the dead man had been bitten by a rattlesnake, but Irish discovered several pellets that appeared to be buckshot in the sand beneath the skeleton.

A little farther on, Noisy saw a live snake and fired at it. His bullets ricocheted off into space, and the two cowboys were startled when an answering fusillade of shots whistled about their heads. Without waiting to ask questions they spurred away from the half dozen men who were firing at them.

Passing an abandoned dwelling, they heard some one moaning inside. They discovered and released three bound captives, Henry Vincent and his wife and son. Vincent, owner of the Box V ranch, said that they had been kidnaped as they were going to their ranch.

The two cowboys and the Vincents went on to Paint City, after meeting the posse that had been searching for the captives. It was this posse, headed by Sheriff Ponca Jones and Dudley Palmer, Box V foreman, that had fired at Irish and Noisy.

In Paint City the two cowboys learned from Windy Grant, deputy sheriff, of the feud between the Box V and the

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Tomahawk ranch. The latter was run by grizzled old Tom Hawks, who had two half-breed sons, Mose and Elija, and a daughter, Joya. Somebody had been rustling Box V cattle, and the Hawks outfit was suspected. The skeleton in the desert was established to be that of Slim Francis, a friend of Windy Grant's, and Irish believed that he had been murdered.

CHAPTER V.

THE HIDEOUT.

PALMER wanted to take the men and try to find the two Hawks boys. His argument with Vincent was that Ponca Jones was friendly to Tom Hawks, and that Ponca Jones wasn't much of an officer, anyway.

"If we can't catch 'em, we'll kill 'em," declared Palmer. "And either way, we'll stop rustlin' in Paint Pot Valley."

"No," was Vincent's reply. "We'll wait a while. I don't want any of our boys killed."

"You want the rustlin' stopped, don'tcha?"

"I'm not paying our men to take chances on their lives," reminded Vincent. "That work is for the sheriff and his deputies."

"Well, suit yourself," said Palmer. "Have you seen Jack this morning, Dud?"

"He rode away about fifteen minutes ago. Took a canteen and a shotgun."

"Didn't he say where he was going?"

"I never asked him, and he didn't say," replied Palmer.

Palmer went down to the corral, where he had a talk with Bill Wing. He told Bill what Vincent had said.

"What are yuh goin' to do about it?" asked Wing.

"I was just thinkin' that me and you might take a ride, Bill. Be funny if we got a crack at them two breeds, eh?"

"Yuh never can tell," grinned Wing.

They waited a while, before saddling their horses and riding away from the ranch.

Jack Vincent had no destination in mind when he left the ranch. He rode a gentle, gun-broken horse, carried a shotgun and a canteen, and felt perfectly safe, even if he did not know the country very well. Jack was city bred, good-looking, and he dressed well. Life on the range had no appeal for him, but he made the best of it, with no complaint.

Mile after mile he rode along. He wore riding breeches, English riding boots, pale blue shirt and a tan Stetson sombrero.

Somehow he managed to get down into a narrow cañon without realizing it, and in order to get out he selected a side cañon which seemed to lead back to the rim.

There was sort of a trail, too narrow for him to turn the horse on; so he slid off on the upper side, worked around in front of the horse and led the animal. The trail led under a jutting cliff, and as he came out into a small opening a man raised up beside him, shoving the muzzle of a rifle solidly against his ribs.

As though one shock was insufficient, another man appeared as if by magic, his cocked rifle covering Jack.

"What you doin' here?" asked the second one.

"I'm just wondering that myself," replied Jack. "As a matter of fact, I was trying to get out of the cañon."

The two men glanced at each other. Both were swarthy, slender, not much older than Jack. He knew instinctively

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that these were the much sought half-breeds, Mose and Elija Hawks.

"Do you know who I am?" asked Jack.

"Do you think we are damn fools?" retorted one of them. "You are Jack Vincent."

"I have never known you."

"What you think I ought to do—cry about it?"

"You might at least take that gun out of my ribs," replied Jack.

The other man removed Jack's shotgun from the saddle, looked at it contemptuously and removed the cartridges.

"I guess he not hunt for us, Mose," grinned the one with the rifle.

"Not with this gun."

"I suppose I may go on now?" said Jack hopefully.

"You stay here. I like to know how the hell you find this place."

"It was an accident. As I told you before, I was trying to get out of the cañon. You don't mean that you are going to keep me here."

"Huh! If we let you go, you tell where we are."

"No, I wouldn't. As a matter of fact, I don't even know where this place is. I'd never be able to find it again."

Mose looked at him keenly. "You know what I think."

"I'm sure I don't know what you think."

"I think everybody from that Box V is a damn liar."

They led Jack under the overhang of the cliff, where they had arranged their camp.

"Don't try to get away," warned Mose. "We won't tie you up. If you try to get away, we shoot you."

"How long must I stay here?" asked Jack.

Mose shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

THE sun had nearly set when Dud Palmer and Bill Wing sprawled in the shade of the rim of the big cañon. Palmer had an old pair of field-glasses which he used industriously. He had an idea that the two half-breeds were hiding somewhere around the breaks of Piute Cañon, but as yet they had found no trace of them. Bill Wing sprawled on his back, half asleep, when Palmer's sharp grunt brought him to attention. He turned over and looked at Palmer, who had the glasses glued to his eyes.

"It's a rider," he said tensely. "She's comin' up the cañon, walkin' her horse slow."

"A woman?"

"Joya Hawks. I can tell by her shirt and hat. Sure, it is! Ridin' that half-breed palomino. You take a look, Bill."

Bill Wing quickly confirmed Palmer's statement. He wanted to keep on watching her, but Palmer took the glasses away from him.

"She's stopped down there," said Palmer.

"I don't need glasses to see her now," replied Bill.

"She's gittin' off her horse and lookin' at somethin' on the ground; mebbe tracks. By golly, she's goin' in to that side cañon, leadin' her horse; and she's got a big pack of some kind on the back of her saddle."

Palmer sprang to his feet and quickly put away the glasses.

"I know a place where we can look down into that small cañon," he said. "Bill, we're in luck; she's takin' stuff to them breeds."

They ran back to their horses, mounted quickly, and Palmer led the way.

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Joya Hawks was worried over those horse tracks, which continued right up the narrow cañon trail. It was not like Mose and Elija to allow tracks to show; they always brushed them out. She went slowly and cautiously, leaving her horse and going the last hundred feet alone. Joya was not a blood relation to the two boys. Tom Hawks had adopted her as a baby after her parents died in a flood. No one but Joya and the Hawks family knew this. However, the affection between the girl and the two boys was as genuine as that between any sister and brothers.

As quietly as she came, Mose heard her and was there when she stepped into the opening.

"Whose horse came in here, Mose?" she asked.

"A visitor," grinned Mose.

"A visitor?"

"Come and see him."

Joya stepped around under the overhang of the cliff and came face to face with Jack Vincent. He looked at her in amazement.

"Hello, Joya," said Elija.

"What are you doing here?" asked Joya, ignoring Elija.

"Are you Joya Hawks?" asked Jack.

"Yes."

"Well, good Lord!" exclaimed Jack. "Why didn't somebody tell me that the prettiest girl in the world lived in these hills?"

Joya blushed, but her lips shut in a tight line.

"I don't mind being a prisoner half so much now," said Jack.

"How did you get here?" she asked.

"Oh, I got lost and tried to get out of the cañon."

"What were you doing in the cañon?"

Jack smiled at her. "I'm sorry. You see, I didn't know it was wrong to ride down the cañon."

"Joya, we'll have to move," said Mose.

The girl nodded thoughtfully.

"I've got more food on my saddle," she said. "Go get my horse."

Elija glided away to bring in the horse.

"Sit down, won't you?" asked Jack. "I want to talk with you."

"There is nothing for us to talk about," said Joya.

"Oh, yes, there is. No, I'm not interested in your brothers. I'm not at all concerned as to whether the law gets them or not. In fact, since seeing you, I hope the law doesn't catch them."

"Isn't that being disloyal?" queried Joya.

"Disloyal to the law?"

"No, to your father."

"Oh, well, Dad naturally wants to stop rustling; but he really isn't convinced that your brothers are the ones."

"He isn't?"

Jack Vincent laughed easily, and his eyes strayed to Mose, who sat there, holding a rifle across his knees.

"Dad held a meeting last night," said Jack. "The two cowboys who found us in that old shack were there, and when the question came up about that misbranded calf, the one named O'Shea questioned Palmer's evidence. It impressed Dad so much that he spoke about it to me to-day. It must have impressed him because I'm the last person he ever discusses things with."

ELIJA brought the horse into the clearing and was removing the canvas sack from behind the saddle when he suddenly jerked aside.

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"Look out!" he exclaimed sharply and made a dive for his rifle against the wall.

As Mose sprang to his feet a bullet whined off a rock near Elija. Jack turned half around, flung out both hands and fell. Elija sent two shots in quick succession toward the top of the cliffs, then sprang in behind a corner of the rock. Jack got back to his feet and went stumbling into the open, where he fell again in plain view of the two men on top of the cliff.

Joya started to run out to him, but Mose held her back.

"Stay here!" he grunted.

"But they shot him!" she gasped.

"Sure; and they shoot you, too. Stay here."

High up in the rocks Dud Palmer crouched and looked through his field-glasses.

"It's Jack Vincent," he said softly, as though afraid he might be heard. "Either we got him—or they did. No chance to do anythin' now, Bill. It'll be dark in thirty minutes. Our best bet is to head back to the ranch and say nothin'."

"That's right," nodded Bill. "Nobody knows we came here."

"There'll be hell to pay when Vincent finds this out. Mebbe everythin' is workin' out right. C'mon."

After a wait of fifteen minutes, Elija went out and carried Jack out of the clearing.

"Right side, high up," said Mose. "Damn bad hurt. We've got to get him to a doctor before he dies."

"That's all right," said Elija. "We pack him on his horse and take him to ranch. We got to move, anyway. Can't take him to town."

"Best take him to ranch," agreed Mose. "Joya or father can go for doctor. Damn hard luck."

As carefully as possible they put Jack on the horse. Joya rode ahead, while Mose led the packed horse and Elija walked beside him, careful to see that Jack stayed in place. It was about four miles to the ranch, and Tom Hawks was waiting anxiously for Joya to return.

Quickly she told him what had happened, and they were taking Jack into the house when Irish and Noisy arrived. They couldn't have arrived at a more inopportune time, as far as the Hawks were concerned. Mose slunk back in the darkness, covering them with his gun, while Elija was ready to draw and shoot quickly.

"Need any help?" asked Irish quickly. "Here, let me pack his legs. Grab him on the other side, Noisy."

They took Jack into the house and placed him on a bed. Tom Hawks leaned back against the wall and looked keenly at the two cowboys.

"You can tell the boys to put away their guns," said Irish evenly. "We're not interested in them."

At a sign from their father both boys relaxed, but did not lose their vigilance.

"The boy is hurt bad," said Tom Hawks. "We must have a doctor."

"I think I had better tell you what happened to him," said Joya. Her explanation was short and to the point.

"That's a bad situation," said Irish. "It puts you folks in a tough corner. No matter who shot him, they'll blame you. And with the way things are now, it'll add fuel to the flames."

"True," nodded Tom Hawks. "It is something that must be faced."

"I'll go and get the doctor," offered Joya.

"No; wait!" said Irish. "I'll go after him. I'll say that me and Noisy found him beside the road and brought

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him here. The only way they can disprove this is for somebody to come out and say he shot him."

"And," added Noisy, "even then they couldn't prove we didn't find him here. Hop to it, Irish."

"Why should you shoulder our troubles?" asked Hawks.

"Well," grinned Irish, "we're never satisfied except when we're in trouble; and right now we ain't got none of our own. Remember, Noisy, we found him a mile or so down the road, and packed him here on his own horse."

"I bring his shotgun along," said Mose, exhibiting the gun.

"Great stuff!" exclaimed Irish. "Give it to me and I'll drop it near where we found him. Where's his hat? Good! This will give the sheriff somethin' to find."

"Yuh better spread the word in town," suggested Noisy, "so that somebody will ride out and tell his folks."

A FEW minutes after Irish rode away, Mose and Elija held a low-voiced conversation with their father, then faded away in the night, taking food with them. Tom Hawks knew something of rough surgery, and went to work on Jack Vincent.

"He's hurt bad," said the big man. "But he won't die, if the doctor can locate that bullet. I don't think it went deep, because it had mushroomed on the rock before it hit him. He did not bleed much."

It was nearly an hour before the doctor arrived, and with him came Irish, the sheriff and Windy Grant. The doctor did not ask any questions, but went to work at once. Tom Hawks had heated plenty of water, so there was no delay.

"I sent word out to the Box V," said the sheriff to Hawks. "I suppose it would have been better to have taken him home, but under the circumstances this is best. Tom, who the devil would shoot this kid?"

Tom Hawks shook his head slowly. "I don't know, Ponca. It will probably be blamed on my two boys."

"I suppose. But they wouldn't have any reason for shootin' him."

It did not take long for the doctor to recover the bullet. Irish brought it out to them and they examined it under the light. It had originally been a soft-nose 30-30, now an almost shapeless mass of lead and metal jacket. The sheriff took out his pocket-knife and twisted back a small flap of lead.

"Here's a damn funny thing," he said. "A piece of stone in the bullet."

The men looked curiously at each other.

"I'll betcha I know what happened," said Irish quickly. "Somebody fired a shot, mebbe at a target or coyote, or somethin'. Do yuh see what I mean? The bullet glanced off a rock and hit young Vincent."

"Like it did the day we chased you two!" exclaimed the sheriff. "O'Shea, you think fast."

Tom Hawks drew a deep breath of genuine relief.

"I'm going to make a pot of coffee," said Joya, and went out to the kitchen.

Vincent nearly killed a buggy team in a wild race to get to his son's bedside. Mrs. Vincent was hysterical, but the doctor calmed her with the assurance that Jack was not going to die. Dud Palmer came on horseback, and he looked curiously at Irish as the young man lied about finding Jack beside the road.

Mrs. Vincent wanted to move Jack right away.

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"This boy is not going to be moved for at least a week," declared the doctor.

"Then I stay right here with him."

Tom Hawks and Henry Vincent looked at each other. Vincent turned and looked grimly at his wife.

"It seems to me," said Tom Hawks, "that the feud between the Box V and the Tomahawk will be called off for a week."

"I'm sorry we have to intrude on you," replied Vincent, "but with both myself and my wife our son comes first."

"It's a natural thing for parents to feel that way about their son," said Tom Hawks.

Vincent flushed quickly, started to say something, but changed his mind. Joya brought in some more coffee, and Mrs. Vincent accepted a cup.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHERIFF SUSPECTS.

THE next morning Irish and Noisy showed the sheriff where they claimed to have found Jack Vincent. Near the spot they found Jack's hat and shotgun, proving to the sheriff's satisfaction that this was the spot where Jack had been shot down.

He got back on his horse, when an idea struck him.

"What horse was Jack Vincent ridin'?" he asked.

"I didn't pay much attention," replied Irish. "It was dark, yuh see. The horse was plumb gentle, so we put Jack on the horse and took him to the ranch. The horse and saddle are still there."

"Uh-huh. Did it happen to be an old roan?"

"Yeah, I think it was," said Noisy.

The sheriff got off his horse again and looked all over the ground. Irish had been smart enough to turn his horse around a few times in the sandy spot, and had also tracked the place up with his own prints. Finally the sheriff mounted and they all rode out to the Tomahawk.

Irish wondered why the sheriff had examined the tracks so closely. They dismounted at the Tomahawk stable, where Tom Hawks waited for them. The old blue-roan was in the corral, and the sheriff asked if that was Jack Vincent's horse.

They all agreed that it was. The sheriff crawled through the fence, caught the animal and picked up its right front foot.

"C'mere," he said to Irish, who crawled through and looked at the shod hoof. The shoe was nearly new and had a cross-bar.

Irish looked closely at the sheriff, who said softly:

"I saw that horse shod in Paint City not more'n a week ago. Old blue horse run a nail in the frog of his foot, and it was so tender that the blacksmith put on that bar for protection."

Irish nodded solemnly. There had been no marks of that bar shoe where they claimed to have found Jack Vincent.

"Would yuh mind lettin' it drift a while?" asked Irish. "Yuh see, Jack Vincent ain't goin' to die; and he's the one to tell how he got shot — and where."

"Well—for the time being," nodded the sheriff. "I just wanted yuh to know that yuh wasn't foolin' me."

Tom Hawks and Noisy had been watching them, but did not hear what was said. Nor did Irish or Ponca Jones offer any explanation.

"The boy ain't conscious yet," said Tom Hawks. "He's got quite a bit of

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fever, but the doctor says he'll be all right."

"Mrs. Vincent still here?" asked Irish.

"Yeah—both of 'em. They stayed all night."

"And here comes Dud Palmer and Bill Wing," said the sheriff. "The first thing you know, Tom, you'll have all the Box V over here."

Irish and Noisy stayed down at the corral, while the others went up to the house. Noisy was curious to know why the sheriff had asked Irish to examine the hoof of the blue-roan. When Irish told him, Noisy whistled softly.

"Ponca Jones ain't so dumb after all," said Noisy. "Well, don't that put us in a bad spot?"

"He's goin' to be lenient, unless he catches us at somethin' else," grinned Irish. "In fact, he's goin' to let Jack Vincent tell where he got shot."

THE two Box V horses were tied at the front porch, and as the two cowboys went up there to sit down, Irish looked at the two animals. One wore a Double Diamond brand on the right shoulder and a Box V on the right hip. The other, a tall sorrel, ridden by Palmer, was branded with a Box Wheel on the right hip. Irish was always curious about brands. He finally came over and sat beside Noisy.

Vincent came out on the porch with Palmer and Wing. He spoke pleasantly to Irish and Noisy, but Palmer and Wing did not speak. After a few moments of conversation Palmer and Wing rode away.

"How's the boy gettin' along?" asked Irish.

"The doctor says he's getting along very well, thank you, O'Shea. You see, he's not in very good health, and that bullet was a terrible shock. It was certainly lucky for all of us that you boys found him when you did, and I thank you for what you did."

"Don't mention it," replied Irish dryly. "Mr. Vincent, where is the Double Diamond brand located?"

"Double Diamond? Why, that is a Wyoming brand. You saw it on Bill Wing's horse."

"Is the Box Wagon Wheel a Wyomin' brand, too?"

"Oh, no; the Box Wagon Wheel is located about forty miles west of here. Small outfit, owned, I believe, by a man named Brunk. He came in here a year ago to peddle some horses."

"Mr. Vincent, ain't you got any idea why you and yore family was kidnaped?"

"O'Shea, if I had, I'd surely get some action. It is a mystery to all of us. Perhaps if you two boys hadn't found us we'd have discovered the reason."

"You sent a wire over here, sayin' you was comin', didn't yuh?"

"I did. Through negligence at the Canoga office they failed to deliver the telegram until the day before we arrived. In fact, I believe the telegram reached Palmer in the evening, and we were to arrive in Paint City the following morning. The stage leaves Canoga at an early hour, and arrives at Paint City before noon."

"And you'd been prisoners about twenty-four hours when we discovered yuh?"

"Just about," replied Vincent.

"You stayed all night in Canoga?"

"Yes. Our train arrived there at nine o'clock in the evening."

"In plenty of time for two men to have left Canoga and stuck up the stage here in the valley."

"But for Heaven's sake—why?" asked Vincent.

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Irish ignored the question.

"Did you know Slim Francis?" he asked.

"I certainly did. Slim was a fine fellow. Yes, I heard about him being killed by a rattler, and you boys finding the skeleton and gun."

"He worked for yuh, didn't he?"

"He did."

"Didja ever hear of him havin' trouble with anybody at the Box V?"

"I never did. Everybody seemed to like Slim. But why do you ask if he ever had trouble?"

"Because Slim Francis was murdered, Mr. Vincent."

"Murdered? Why, they said he was killed by a snake."

"He was," nodded Irish. "The kind that don't rattle."

"Why, who in the world would murder Slim Francis?"

Irish shrugged his shoulders and rolled a cigarette.

VINCENT studied Irish O'Shea's profile for a while.

"I don't quite understand you, O'Shea," he said. "Are you a range detective?"

"Me a detective?" Irish laughed softly. "No, Mr. Vincent, I'm jist a bug-headed cowpuncher, tryin' to git along."

"You may be only a cowpuncher, but you've got brains."

"Oh, Gawd!" wailed Noisy softly. "That'll spoil my life. I'll never be able to live with him again. Mr. Vincent, you're what Teddy Roosevelt would call a nature faker. If a man had brains he'd never be a cowpuncher, don'tcha see?"

Tom Hawks came out on the porch and interrupted the conversation. He said:

"Vincent, your son is conscious, and the doctor says you can see him a few minutes."

Vincent hurried into the house, and Tom Hawks sat down with the two cowboys.

"The sheriff knows we didn't find Jack Vincent out there on the road," said Irish. "Jack's horse wears a bar-shoe, and there wasn't any bar-shoe tracks."

"So that was it, eh?" mused Hawks. "Now he will be puzzled. You see, Joya was with Jack Vincent when he recovered consciousness, and they talked together. Not even the doctor knew this. She told him what had been done, and he said he would tell the sheriff the same thing."

In a few minutes the sheriff came out. He looked at the three men on the porch, walked heavily down the steps, turned at the bottom and looked at them again.

"Didja ever hear of a feller named Di-ogg-knees?" he asked.

Tom Hawks smiled softly.

"Diogenes?" he asked. "Yes, I have, Ponca. I believe he carried a lantern, trying to locate an honest man."

"If I see him," said the sheriff seriously, "I'll tell him he don't need to go pokin' around here."

And then he walked down to his horse. Tom Hawks chuckled softly.

"Ponca is all right," he said. "A sense of humor is one of the greatest gifts that a good God ever gave to man."

"That's right," nodded Irish "But sometimes it's mighty hard to see the funny side of things. It's a dirty shame that yore two boys have to hide out. Personally, I don't believe they're guilty."

"Thank you, son. They're good boys, Mose and Elija. I'd bank on them bein' honest. Their Indian blood is

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strong. They are not a bit proud of their white blood. I wonder if the white blood is the stronger. They don't seem to have much sense of humor."

"Did their mother have a sense of humor?" asked Noisy.

Tom Hawks got slowly to his feet, carefully brushed off the knees of his overalls and began filling his old pipe. Finally he glanced at Noisy, a twinkle in his eyes.

"I think she did," he said slowly. "You see, she married me."

CHAPTER VII.

SWIFTWATER'S DEATH.

OLD Swiftwater Bill Smith, cook at the Box V, cleaned up his kitchen carefully. Swiftwater had been running the culinary department of the Box V for five years. He was slightly over five feet in height, built on the general proportions of a barrel. His head was nearly bald, scarred from many a fight, and his mustache fuzzed out under his generous nose like the whiskers of an angry bob-cat.

Finished with his work, he removed his apron, made of a Four X flour sack, and carefully hung it beside the stove. Then he went to his own little room behind the kitchen, where he carefully changed to his rusty-black Sunday suit and a white, stiff bosomed shirt. His neck was too short for any style of collar, so he never wore one.

On his head he placed a nearly new Stetson hat, with a very high crown. To top off his raiment he shoved a big Colt .45 inside the waistband of his pants, shoved all his other clothes into a war-bag, picked it up and went down to the stable. He saddled a gentle white horse, tied on his war-bag and crawled into the saddle. The horse and riding rig belonged to Swiftwater.

At the front gate he drew up and looked back at the empty house. Then he pulled down the brim of his hat, spoke to the white horse, and went down the road to Paint City. Swiftwater Bill Smith had quit his job.

No one in Paint City paid any attention to the entrance of Swiftwater Bill. He rarely came to town, except with a team and wagon. Going straight to the Silver Peso Saloon, he drank alone.

"Yuh look like Sunday, Bill," observed the bartender.

"Yeah, and I feel like Friday," grunted Swiftwater. "Don't put that bottle away every time; I'm here to drink."

Eight drinks of strong liquor reposed beneath the belt of Swiftwater when he said to the bartender in a confidential tone:

"Eddie, I can lick anythin' of m' own weight this side of the Miss'sip-ee River."

Eddie Melchoir, the bartender, breathed upon a glass, polished it carefully, holding it up to the light.

"Yo're a mighty good cook," admitted Eddie.

"How long do yuh reckon I'd hold m' job if I washed dishes thataway, Eddie?"

"Washed 'em in what way, Swiftwater?"

"Yawnin' on 'em thataway."

"Oh, I ain't washin' 'em; I'm polishin' 'em."

"I suppose yuh spit on 'em to do yore washin'. Ho, hum!"

Swiftwater turned around and looked at the empty room just as Noisy Waters and Windy Grant came in. Windy looked reprovingly at the old cook.

"Birthday?" he asked.

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"Yeah," nodded Swiftwater. "I'm about to buy a drink."

NOISY squinted thoughtfully as he looked at the old cook. He had seen Swiftwater out at the Box V, and remarked that the cook looked like some one he had known. Swiftwater considered Noisy for several moments.

"Listen, feller," he said. "About five years ago there was a young squirt a-workin' for the Seven Cross in Wyomin', and if you don't look like him, I'll—"

"Swiftwater Smith!" snorted Noisy. "Uncle Bill!"

"That's me," grinned Swiftwater as they shook hands. "Say, I seen you out at the Box V, and I says to m'self, 'If I wasn't sure he'd been hung long before this I'd swear that feller is a young hellion named Waters.' Why I knowed yore dad up in the Wind River country.

"I said to him one day, I says, 'Henry'—if yuh remember, his name was Hank, but I called him Henry, for short—'Henry, that there offspring of yours is goin' to be law-meat, if yuh don't hobble him.' And Henry actchally cried. He says, 'Swiftwater, yo're right. My only hope is to keep him so skinny and thin that he won't weigh enough to break his neck when they drop him through the gallers.'"

"I've often wondered why Paw was such a poor provider," said Noisy. "I can see it all now. He was doin' it to save me, and I was so ungrateful that I thought he was stingy."

"He had yore interests at heart. Let's drink to his memory."

They drank to Noisy's paternal ancestor, and before they ran out of male Waters to toast, more or less of Noisy's family tree had been irrigated with *spiritus frumenti*, and Noisy was beginning to live up to his nickname.

"Paw was a great man," declared Noisy.

"One of the greatest," admitted Swiftwater.

"Wasn't many like him," said Noisy.

"No, they didn't," agreed Swiftwater.

"Didn't what?" asked Windy.

"Didn't like him. But he was a square-shooter. I 'member one time over in Wind River, Hank and a feller named Ase Scroggins had a gun fight. Hank shot the gun out of Ase's hand and then knocked Ase down with a punch on the jaw.

"Hank says, 'Stand up and git shot like a man, Ase; I never kill a man when he's down.' That's the kind of a man Hank Waters was."

"Did Ase git up?" asked Windy.

"Oh, yeah. We had quite a funeral next day."

"Let's drink one to Ase," suggested Noisy.

The suggestion met with instant approval.

"How does it happen that yo're in town to-day?" asked Windy. "Has the Box V stopped eatin'?"

"I've quit the job."

"No!"

"Yessir, I've done quit—cold."

"What did Palmer say about it?"

"I never told him," said Swiftwater owlishly. "'S none of his damn business. He never hired me."

SWIFTWATER downed another full glass of whisky, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and looked at his reflection in the back-bar mirror.

"I'll tell yuh about me," he said thickly. "There's two ends to thish

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thing—and I'm the middle. I've got to the point where I can't play the game; so I jus' cuts loosh."

"I don't quite git yuh, Swiftwater," said Windy.

"I didn' 'spect yuh to," gurgled the old cook. "'Nother drink, barten'er."

"How do yuh figure yo're in the middle, Uncle Bill?" asked Noisy.

"I've got a con-con-con-shunsh."

"You mean you've got a conscience?"

"Tha's what I shed."

"It's somethin' new with yuh, ain't it?" asked Windy.

"Preshumably," nodded Swiftwater, spilling whisky on the bar as he tried to pour his own drink.

"Swiftwater," said Windy, "you heard about findin' the re-mains of poor Slim Francis, didn't yuh?"

The old cook shut one eye and studied his own reflection in the mirror.

"Oh, yeah—Slim. Do yuh know," the old cook turned from the mirror, "that Slim quit jist like I did. Never shed a word—jist quit and went away."

"Was he in the middle, too?" asked Noisy.

"No-o-o-o, I don't reckon he was. No, he was kinda on the end."

The sound of loud voices on the street caused them to leave the bar and walk to the doorway. Here were Bill Wing, Dud Palmer, Mose and Elija Hawks. Mose Hawks's right hand was roughly bandaged, and one side of Elija's head was smeared with dried blood.

"Where's Ponca Jones?" asked Palmer.

"I reckon he's out at the Tomahawk," replied Windy. "At least him and O'Shea went out there. Where the devil didja pick up the prisoners?"

"Never mind that!" snapped Palmer. "They drilled Art Ball, and we left him with the doctor."

"He was afraid he'd stop an Apache bullet," said Noisy.

"Well, we got 'em," said Palmer. "And they won't git away."

"I'll take charge of 'em," said Windy, starting out to the horses.

"You will like hell!" snapped Palmer. "We've gone to all the trouble to capture 'em—and nobody gits 'em but the sheriff."

"Nobody sent yuh out to git 'em," retorted Windy. "It seems to me you've taken quite a lot of responsibility on yourselves."

"Is that so?" sneered Bill Wing. "Well, the sheriff's office was asleep on the job. If you don't like what we're doing—"

"Palmer! You and Wing put 'em up high!"

Old Swiftwater Bill had stepped from the doorway, swinging up his big gun. His old eyes glittered and the hand holding the cocked gun was as firm as a rock.

"Up high!" he snapped. "Never mind them reins. You fools, do yuh want me to shoot yuh both? Drop them ropes."

Neither of the half-breeds had been roped. Unarmed and crippled, there was no need for ropes.

"You drunken old fool!" gritted Palmer impotently.

"Mose! You and Elija go like hell," said Swiftwater; and before any one realized it, both men were galloping swiftly out of town.

Old Swiftwater shifted his eyes as he watched the riders fade out in a cloud of dust; and the shift was fatal. Like the striking head of a rattler, Bill Wing's hand flashed down and up. The report of the .45 echoed in the nar-

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row street, and Swiftwater Bill's legs crumpled under him.

HE had barely sprawled on the sidewalk when Palmer and Wing were racing after the two half-breeds, but with not a chance on earth to ever recover them. A crowd quickly gathered, and they took the old man in the Silver Peso. There was no use sending for a doctor; he was dead before he fell. But they sent for him, anyway. Noisy and Windy went out and sat down in the shade.

"Some day I hope I have to kill Bill Wing," said Windy.

Noisy shook his head dumbly. "Awful fast, that Bill Wing. Irish O'Shea is the only man I know that's as fast as Bill Wing. But why did the old man do that?"

"Yuh mean, why did he stick 'em up and release the Hawks boys? I can't tell yuh. He wasn't so awful drunk. Gosh, I'm sorry. He was a nice old feller. Funny about him knowin' all about yore father, Noisy."

"Funny—yeah," replied Noisy softly. "Yuh see, Windy, my father never was in Wind River. He never shot anybody in his life. He was a carpenter in Seattle, and died when I was eight years old."

"I'll be danged! Poor old Swiftwater was lyin', eh?"

"Jist romancin'," sighed Noisy. "I wish I knowed why he stuck up Palmer and Wing. Why did he want them half-breeds turned loose? Was Swiftwater a friend to Tom Hawks?"

"If he was, I never heard about it."

About an hour later Ponca Jones and Irish O'Shea came back to Paint City. Windy described what happened at the Silver Peso. It was rather a shock to Ponca, who had known the old cook a long time.

"So Palmer and Wing are takin' the law in their own hands, eh?" he grunted. "And Art Ball got drilled, eh? Bad?"

"Through the right shoulder, kinda high," replied Windy. "It won't kill him."

"Well, I'm goin' out and tell that Box V outfit to keep their damn paws off my job," declared the sheriff. "Irish told me what happened to Jack Vincent, and I'll bet it was Palmer or Wing who shot him. Accidental, of course, but—oh, well, what's the use?"

Windy had to be told how Jack Vincent got shot.

"But we didn't fool the sheriff," grinned Irish. "He looked for a barshoe track."

"Fool me plenty, when Jack Vincent told the same story," grinned the sheriff. "I'll ride back and tell Vincent about his cook."

IRISH questioned Noisy about the shooting of the old cook, and Noisy explained about Swiftwater's alibi for leaving his job at the Box V. Irish listened thoughtfully.

"So he said there was two ends to it, and he was the middle, eh? And his conscience forced him to cut loose from the job. Sounds kinda funny to me."

"It did to me," admitted Noisy. "And when we spoke of Slim Francis, he said that Slim quit the job jist like he did, never sayin' a word to anybody about it."

"He did, eh?"

"How's everythin' at the Tomahawk?"

Irish grinned softly.

"Mamma Vincent is scared to death."

"Scared of what?"

"That her little Jackie is goin' to

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fall in love with Joya. Vincent told me. He said it worried him too. Vincent spoke to Tom Hawks about it, and Tom Hawks told him to mind his own business."

"Good for Hawks!" snorted Noisy. "But I don't suppose anybody has consulted Joya in the matter."

"I did."

"You did!"

"Yeah. I told her everythin' I'd heard. She thanked me for the information, and said it might be a good scheme to wait a while and see how much truth there was in the reports. Mamma sets there and watches both of 'em. Ain't nobody goin' to steal the apple of her eye, y'betcha. Her and Joya never speak to each other. Joya's proud. Poor Vincent, he kinda sags around, wishin' that everybody would be happy."

"Let's go and get a drink before supper," suggested Noisy. "I need one."

Vincent came back with the sheriff, and Irish met him on the street. Vincent was mad.

"I'm through with Palmer," he declared. "After what he and Bill Wing did to-day, I'm through. I'll buy out his share of the Box V, and boot him off the place. O'Shea, when I finish with Palmer, will you run the Box V for me?"

"Will you do me a favor?" countered Irish.

"If it is possible, yes."

"Leave Palmer where he is."

"You mean—not buy him out?"

"Not yet. You can always do that."

"You know what he did to-day?"

"I know all about it. Hire a new cook and let things ride."

"As a favor, I'll do it. I don't know what your idea is, O'Shea, but I'll take a chance."

Irish left Vincent and went back to the hotel, where he wrote a note at the desk and put it in his pocket.

The hotel keeper was a loquacious soul, rather filled with an indignation over the killing of Swiftwater Bill, and not afraid to express his disapproval of Bill Wing.

Irish finally switched the conversation around to a general talk about the adjoining ranges, and left the hotel with all the information he needed. He found Noisy in the Silver Peso Saloon and took him outside.

"We're ridin' to-night, Noisy," he said. "I reckon we better take a slicker along."

"Goin' far?" asked Noisy.

"Plenty," replied Irish. "I'll tell yuh about it as we ride."

CHAPTER VIII.

UNFRIENDLY HOST.

FORTY miles of road had reeled beneath the hoofs of their horses when Irish and Noisy drew up at the little town of Paradise Springs—if it could be called a town. It consisted of three buildings: a general store, a saloon—and an empty building. Three miles south of the town was the little flag station, bearing the same name.

Paradise Springs was still asleep when they came in. They watered their horses at a trough outside a stable behind the store, and waited for some one to put in an appearance. It finally came in the person of a frowsy individual, probably the swamper for the saloon.

"Which way is the Box Wagon Wheel Ranch, and how far is it?" asked Irish.

"She's no'th from here," replied the

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man. "I raickon it's jist about th'ee miles."

"Ain't no restaurant here, is there?" asked Noisy.

The man looked all around and chuckled softly.

"Ev'y time a man asks me that I have to take a look. Wasn't none when I went to bed last night; but out heah yuh never can tell what'll happen ovah night."

"We could prob'ly git breakfast at the Box Wagon Wheel."

"I raickon yuh might. Jim Brunk and his men was in here last night. They been a-loadin' cows down at the spur, and I heerd Jim say they'd be a-loadin' agin to-day."

"Jim's a pretty good feller, ain't he?" asked Irish.

"Takin' him by and large, I raickon he's as good as most. If yuh aim t' go up there, take that no'th road out theah behind the saloon. It only runs to the Box Wagon Wheel."

"If Brunk and his gang are loadin' cows this mornin', they'll come down through here, won't they?"

"No-o-o. The spur's over theah to the east, and they go straight down from the ranch house. They owns the loadin' corrals."

Irish thanked the man, and they rode on out to the ranch. It was sort of a makeshift, tumbledown old place. But as far as the two cowboys could see, it was a good range country. They rode in and dismounted at the ranch house, where the cook came out to squint inquiringly at them. He was a tall, oldish sort, emaciated, and with skin like weathered leather. Unkempt of appearance, unsmiling, he waited for them to speak.

"Is Jim Brunk here?" asked Irish. The cook shook his head.

"Loadin' cows this mornin'?" queried Irish. After a short period of contemplation, the cook nodded shortly.

"We're from Paint City, pardner," explained Irish briskly. "We rode all night and we're plumb tired. I've got a message for Jim Brunk from a man down there. How about a bite of breakfast?"

"C'mon in; I'll fix yuh up."

The cook's manner changed quickly. The two cowboys entered the main room and sat down, while the cook rattled dishes and banged pans on the stove. He proved to be a good cook, and he did not ask any personal questions. It was apparently against his nature to be pleasant, but he tried hard to please.

They finished breakfast and the cook took them over to the little bunk house. It was evident that only three men occupied the bunk house.

"You can take a sprawl here," said the cook, and went back.

"I wouldn't want to eat here if that jigger didn't like me," grinned Noisy, as he drew off his boots. "He'd put ground glass in yore food."

"Yeah," agreed Irish. "There's nothing effeminate about him, that's a cinch."

They awoke in the middle of the afternoon. Neither Brunk nor his men had returned. The cook offered to fix some food, but they told him to wait until supper time.

IT was nearly dark when Jim Brunk rode in at the ranch. He was a big man, with a square-cut face, hard gray eyes and a narrow mouth. Irish and Noisy heard him talking to the cook, but did not hear what was said. A few moments later Brunk came into the main room.

He seemed as uncompromising as

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the cook, as he threw his hat aside and looked at the two strange cowboys.

"The cook said yuh had a message for me," he said bluntly.

"Yo're Jim Brunk?" asked Irish.

"Of course I am," replied Brunk. "Who the hell didja think I was?"

"I'm no mind reader," replied Irish coldly. He took his time in producing the note he had written in Paint City. Brunk looked keenly at Irish, as he took the note and walked over to a window where the light was sufficient for him to read.

He frowned over the note for several moments. It was merely a folded piece of paper, not sealed in any way. Brunk put the note in his pocket, making no comment at all.

"Supper's ready," he said shortly, and the two cowboys followed him into the kitchen. There were three extra places at the table.

"Finished loadin'," said Brunk. "Boys stopped at Paradise Springs to have a few drinks."

That was the extent of the supper conversation. It was evident to Irish that Brunk did not trust them. After supper Brunk sat down near the lamp in the main room and read a dog-eared magazine. As far as he was concerned, these strangers meant nothing.

"I reckon we'll hit the hay early," said Irish. "Where do we sleep, Brunk?"

Brunk took his own time in answering the question. Finally he threw the magazine on the table and got to his feet.

"We'll pull out for Paint City in the mornin'," said Irish.

Brunk nodded indifferently as he picked up the lamp and led them up a rickety stairway. It was sort of an attic room, containing one bed, a chair and a bench. The bedding was nondescript, unclean. There was one window, the broken panes patched with paper.

"Do for one night," said Brunk, as he lighted a dirty lamp and placed it on the bench.

Then he turned abruptly and went back down the stairs, closing the door behind him. Irish and Noisy looked at each other quizzically. Irish shrugged his shoulders and sat down to remove his boots, after which he crossed the room and opened the window. It was on the opposite side from the stable, and there was nothing below, except bare, hard ground.

In one corner of the room, leaning against the wall, was a double-barreled shotgun, dusty and plentifully strung with cobwebs. Noisy picked it up and opened it. It was empty, and badly in need of cleaning. Irish examined the gun and discovered that it was a high-grade Fox, nicely decorated. It was not the type of shotgun one might expect to find rusting away in the dust of a cow ranch attic. Irish glanced at the muzzle of the gun.

"I seen that, too," said Noisy softly. "What kind of a bullet can yuh shoot out of a square barrel?"

"It's danged near square," smiled Irish. "But only one barrel. Huh!" He examined the barrel closer and finally laid the gun on the bed. Motioning for Noisy to stay there, he went to the door and opened it cautiously.

Brunk had apparently been outside. He heard the big man close the front door and cross toward the kitchen entrance. The cook came into the kitchen and dropped a load of wood into the woodbox.

"C'MERE, Slick," said Brunk softly, but his words were audible to Irish as he said to the cook: "Go down to Paradise and get the

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boys. Them fellers upstairs ain't what they claim to be. They brought me a note from Paint City, supposed to be written by a man who can't even spell his own name right."

"I didn't like their looks, Jim," replied the cook. "I wondered why yuh bedded 'em down upstairs. Are yuh goin' to let 'em go back to Paint City t'morrow?"

"What you don't know won't hurt yuh none. Go git the boys, and tell 'em to come quiet. We'll do our talkin' outside the house."

"I'm halfway there right now," replied the cook.

Irish closed the door softly and came back to Noisy.

"As a forger, I'm a danged good roper," whispered Irish. "Me and you are goin' away from here."

As quietly as possible they constructed a blanket and tarpaulin rope. Irish took the chair and effectively blocked the door, after which they cautiously slid down the improvised rope. There was no moonlight. Softly they went down to the stable. Noisy saddled the two horses, while Irish watched from the doorway. Then they rode slowly away from the Box Wagon Wheel and traveled along about a mile before leaving the road, waiting for the cook and the boys from the ranch to go past.

"What the hell yuh got there—that shotgun?" queried Noisy.

"Yeah. I'm gittin' to be a reg'lar tourist—pickin' up souvenirs."

"I dunno what the hell yo're goin' to do with that thing."

"I ain't got a whole lot of ideas on the subject m'self, Noisy. But didja notice the initials on the bottom of the trigger-guard?"

"I didn't see any. What are they?"

"J. V. Kinda looks as though this was Jack Vincent's gun; and I'm wonderin' how his gun got over here."

Fifteen or twenty minutes later four riders galloped past and faded out in the darkness.

"Yuh wouldn't have much chance with a prejudiced judge and a four-man jury," said Irish, as they rode toward Paradise Springs.

"Not with all the evidence agin' yuh," admitted Noisy.

CHAPTER IX.

A MOTHER'S FEARS.

JIM VINCENT lifted his tired eyes and looked at his wife. She was seated on the edge of a chair on the front porch of the Tomahawk ranch house. The last few days had aged her years, and her face was set in grim lines.

"It is absolutely unbearable," she repeated. "As soon as Jack is able to travel I shall insist that we all go home—back to the city. And as far as your investments here are concerned, the sooner you lose it all the sooner we will be rid of any and all connections with this insufferable country."

Vincent sighed deeply and shook his head.

"And Tom Hawks, the cattle range philosopher," she added. "Prating of the equality of Indian and white."

"As a matter of fact," said Vincent dryly, "you are worrying about Jack and Joya."

"Why not?" she snapped quickly. "Do you think I want our son to be a squaw man? He actually thinks he's in love with her."

"Are you sure he isn't, my dear?"

"Absurd! Puppy love."

"Perhaps you are right. But isn't this the first time that Jack has shown

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any symptoms? I'm sure he has met enough charming young ladies."

"That is beside the issue. He shall not marry that—that squaw."

"Half-breed," corrected Vincent.

"Well—half-breed, if you like that better. Do you think I want to be a grandmother to a—a—a papoose?"

Mrs. Vincent's eyes filled with indignant tears and her lower lip trembled.

"Trouble, trouble, trouble," sighed Vincent. "The sheriff went out to the ranch and told Palmer and Bill Wing to keep their respective noses out of the sheriff's business, or he'd shoot 'em off. Palmer came out here to talk with me, and Tom Hawks came very, very close to killing Palmer, when Palmer bragged about capturing Mose and Elija. Hawks told Palmer to never come here again, and Hawks told the sheriff that he had warned Palmer to never come on the property of the Tomahawk again. The sheriff replied:

"'Every time I hear of anybody dying or getting killed here I'm worried for fear they might ask me to be a pall-bearer. I don't believe Palmer will pay any attention to that warning, and if he don't I'll apply for the pleasure of lifting on one of them dinky, little silver handles.'"

"I think Mr. Palmer and Mr. Wing were perfectly right in trying to rid this country of those Apache outlaws. When the peace officers are deliberately indifferent to such a condition, I believe that the citizens are perfectly within their rights to make such moves as are necessary."

"My dear," said Vincent, "you have the soul of a Vigilante. Don't you realize that those two boys have never been convicted of any crime? Is it right and proper to kill them, just because they have been suspected?"

"Well, something should be done," replied Mrs. Vincent grimly.

Joya came out on the porch and told Mr. Vincent that Jack wished to see him. Joya was wearing a simple little red dress to-day, instead of her usual overalls and boots. Vincent went into the house and Joya sat down on the steps, paying no attention to Mrs. Vincent.

"I AM glad you came out here," said Mrs. Vincent. "I've wanted an opportunity to speak with you."

"It seems to me that you have never tried speaking directly to me—but about me, in my hearing," replied Joya.

"You have been to school?" asked Mrs. Vincent.

"Three years in high school at Canoga," replied Joya. "I have one more year."

"I am glad of that. I feared I might have difficulty in making you understand the things I want to tell you. But if you have been to a white man's school, I believe you will understand."

Joya sprang to her feet, her cheeks flushed.

"What do you mean by that—a white man's school? Please remember, Mrs. Vincent, an Indian is not colored."

Joya saw no reason to tell this haughty woman that she was not a blood relation to the Hawks family.

"I beg your pardon."

"No, you don't. That isn't from your heart. You are here because of necessity. We extend our poor hospitality, treat you like we would have others treat us—and you sneer at our blood. What is your blood that you are so—so damn proud?"

"My dear! You wrong me."

"If I do, it is because you talk with

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two tongues. I have been taught to say what I think; not think one thing and say another. What is it you wished to say to me, Mrs. Vincent?"

"You are angry now, and I am at a disadvantage. What I wished to talk about should be spoken and thought about in a calm manner. It is about Jack Vincent, my son. Jack is only an impressionable boy. He is studying law in San Francisco, moves in the very best circles, and in due time will become one of the big men of the State. He has a wonderful future. His father is a big man in the city, and Jack will naturally inherit everything we own. In due course of time Jack will marry well, of course, getting a wife who has a social background, and one who can help to further his ambitions. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Yes," said Joya softly. "He will grow fat, possibly bald, drink too much. Then he will grow older, of course, eventually becoming an old man, and finally die and have a big funeral in his honor."

"Why—why I don't—"

"I hate unfinished pictures," said Joya, covering her mouth to suppress a yawn. "Now that we have followed Jack Vincent from law school to the grave, what else is there to say? Unless we wish to pick out—say, one of my brothers. I'm sure their biography would be more thrilling. And in their position there is always a grave danger of not living long enough to become neither fat nor gray. You'll pardon me, but I've got some bread in the oven. Our talk has been very entertaining, Mrs. Vincent."

As Joya went into the house, Mr. Vincent came out to the porch.

"I had a serious talk with Jack," he told her. "He says he can't be moved for several days, but that there's no earthly use of us staying here. Of course, he's out of danger, and all that; so I suppose we may as well arrange to go back to the ranch."

"And — and leave him here — alone?" gasped Mrs. Vincent.

"But, my dear, he won't be alone. There's Tom Hawks and the doctor—and Joya."

"Yes—and Joya," repeated Mrs. Vincent wearily, and went into the house.

IRISH and Noisy rode their weary horses into Paint City at ten o'clock that morning. No one knew where they had been. Ponca Jones, the sheriff, had gone to Canoga, leaving Windy in charge of things around Paint City. They stabled their horses, ate a meal and went to the hotel. Irish was carrying the shotgun over his shoulder when they met Windy Grant and Bill Wing near the entrance to the hotel.

"You fellers been out duck huntin'?" asked Windy. "I been wonderin' where the devil yuh went. Didn't yuh kill anythin'?"

"Jist killed time," grinned Irish. "We was up to Paradise Springs."

"Way up there, eh?"

"Yea-a-ah," drawled Irish, and turned to Bill Wing.

"Saw a friend of yours up there, Wing. He said to tell yuh hello, and to tell Dud Palmer that he'd be down in the next day or so."

"Who was it?" asked Bill.

"A feller named Jim Brunk, boss of the Box Wagon Wheel."

"Yeah," said Bill thinly. "I—I'll tell Palmer."

"We been ridin' all night, Windy," explained Irish. "Now we're goin' to cut us each a big hunk of shut-eye. See

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yuh later. You tell Palmer what Brunk said, Bill."

"Yeah, I'll do that, O'Shea."

As Windy and Bill Wing crossed the street toward the Silver Peso Saloon, Dud Palmer rode into town. He went toward the hitch-rack in front of the post office; so Bill Wing turned back and went to meet him. As Palmer dismounted Bill walked in close to him.

"O'Shea and Waters just rode in from Paradise Springs, Dud," said Wing. "They told me to tell you that they seen Jim Brunk, and that Brunk sent you word that he'd be down here in the next day or so."

Palmer's eyes narrowed as he looked at Bill Wing.

"What the hell was they doin' up at Brunk's place?"

"They didn't say. O'Shea was packin' a shotgun."

"Packin' a shotgun? What the hell was he packin' a shotgun for?"

"You don't suppose I asked him, do yuh?"

"Huh! Said that Jim Brunk would be down here in the next day or so, eh? What the hell's he comin' down here for, I wonder?"

"Anyway," said Bill wearily, "I think yuh ought to buy a drink."

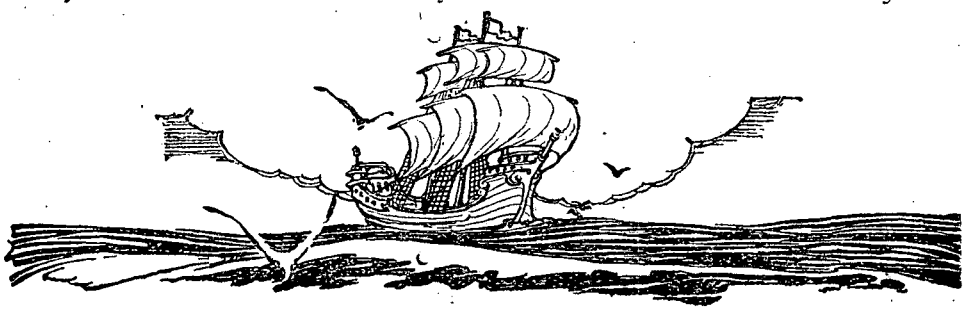
"All right, I'll buy yuh a drink. Now, who the devil would think that them two gallinippers knowed Jim Brunk? Huh, that's funny."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Disappearing Coins

AN operator of cigarette vending machines in London was puzzled when he began to find his stock of cigarettes missing from the machines and found no shillings or even worthless slugs in the cash box. The machines showed no signs of being tampered with and the puzzled operator scratched his head in thought. Finally he discovered the secret of the mystery.

Several youths employed in restaurants, grocery and other stores, where the operator's machines were placed, were caught in the trick of creating ice coins and using them in securing merchandise from the vending machines. A shilling was first placed in a piece of putty, removed and water run into the mould so formed. This was carefully placed in the firm's refrigerator. Some thirty minutes later the putty was removed and any irregularities were nicely removed by the trickster's warm hands. The coin was quickly inserted into the coin chute of the vending machine, working perfectly and causing the goods to be delivered. In just a few seconds the small piece of ice melted away and all evidence was destroyed. —*Tom Murray.*



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Without a word Mungle strode up and struck Carlsen

The Signal

By BILL ADAMS

It was "limey" versus "squarehead" aboard that old sailing ship, with the sea as referee

THE ship was ready to pull out to sea. All but one man of her crew were in her forecastle. One man had not shown up, and the mate had gone ashore to hunt up a substitute.

Except for Mungle you couldn't have said offhand to what nation any of the crew belonged. But for him, they were a spiritless-looking lot. Mungle, a small, scrawny man, reminded one of a belligerent bantam rooster. Seated in a far corner of the forecastle, so that one entering from the deck couldn't see him very well, he was scowling at the others as they arranged their belongings in their bunks. He had taken the best bunk, the top one farthest from the door, and though he was the smallest man there no one had made any protest. He looked up as a big broad blond man with wide blue eyes entered, and his scowl grew darker yet.

"Vell, dere ve ees," said the newcomer, and, tossing his sea bag into the only unoccupied bunk, smiled amicably at the others.

"Dere yer *ees, ees* yer?" snarled Mungle. "An' wot d'yer think yer doin' here? Don't yer know as this here's a Liverpool ship?"

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The newcomer peered into the dark corner and said, "Meester mate say he vant goot man. So I ees coom."

"For a penny I'd poke yer in the eye!" exclaimed Mungle, and he jumped to his feet.

The big fellow looked at Mungle much as one who has never been in the country might look at a bull. "Vott ees matter veez you, my vren?" he asked.

Mungle struck the big fellow, flat-handed, on his ruddy face. The big fellow's hands went up. He set a huge paw on Mungle's chest and sent him reeling backward into the dark corner, whence he rebounded like a rubber ball.

The big man was no boxer, but, despite his great size, was quick. It was plain for any one to see that he would not have fought had he not been compelled to do so. He flailed his long arms about, pushing and poking, and now and then taking a swing with a huge fist. Though Mungle was handy with his fists he could seldom hit the big fellow.

Fighting not being in their line, the rest of the crew moved out to the deck. There was one Spaniard, and he, when Mungle came too close, fingered his knife. But when Mungle moved farther away he also went to the deck. It was the mate, ordering all hands to heave the anchor in, who put a stop to the fight. He stepped into the forecastle and thrust the combatants apart. "You two fools quit your scrapping!" he ordered.

"He's a squarehead, sir! Why don't he sail in his own ships?" muttered Mungle.

The Swede smiled amicably at the mate and said, "Int haff I done nuddings, sir."

The crew tramped round and round the windlass in silence, heaving the anchor in; till the mate called, "What's the matter? Isn't there a chantey-man amongst you?" At that both Mungle and the Swede started to sing. Mungle stopped at once, and looked up at the other.

"Quit yer noise! I'm singing!" he said. But the Swede didn't hear him and continued to sing. "Quit yer noise;" he shouted, and, hearing him now, the Swede paused. But the mate called, "Go ahead and sing, Carlsen!" So Carlsen went on singing.

"I'll take the chant out of yer afore I'm done," muttered Mungle. The rest of the crew joined in the chantey chorus, but he remained silent. When the chantey came to an end the mate said, "Now, Mungle, let's hear you sing!" So then he sang.

The Swede had been silent when the chorus of his chantey came, as though to save his breath that he might the better roar out the next verse. But Mungle sang verse and chorus, too. Joining in the chorus, Carlsen drowned Mungle's voice and every one else's; and that made Mungle furious. But there was nothing he could do about it.

Till evening all hands were busy setting sail, and all the time Mungle nursed his resentment in impotent silence. Carlsen had forgotten all about any trouble. Sometimes when a sail was hoisted one sang, sometimes the other. When Carlsen sang he did so plainly for the joy of singing. When Mungle sang he did so with but one idea—to sing better than Carlsen. "We've got two cracking good chanteymen," said the mate to himself.

The ship had gone to sea with her flag flying. When sunset came the mate said, "One of you men go haul that flag down!"

Carlsen went to the signal halliards and lowered the flag. As he reached to

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take it Mungle glanced up from the compass. The mate was down on the main deck, the skipper out of sight in the chart room.

"Ye ain't fit to touch the old red Duster, ye big pig!" the skipper heard, and, wondering what was up, looked from the chart room door. What he saw was Carlsen folding the flag, and Mungle glowering at him instead of watching the compass.

"Get your eyes on that compass!" shouted the skipper. But Mungle was too late. In the little time that he had been looking away from the compass the ship had come up into the wind. Now all her sails were flapping.

"Get away from that wheel, you worthless rat!" shouted the skipper, and ordered Carlsen to take the wheel in Mungle's place.

"Dere," said Carlsen, and, as he took the wheel, thrust the folded flag into Mungle's hands. Boiling with rage, Mungle let it fall to the deck.

"You'd let the flag fall, would you, you scum!" shouted the skipper, and strode threateningly from the chart room. Mungle hurriedly picked up the flag and put it away. When next minute he joined the rest of the crew down on the main deck the mate said, "Mungle, I supposed you were a sailor and could steer!" So it is easy to see how very much Mungle loved Carlsen.

DUSK fell. All hands were ordered to the quarterdeck. One by one, the two mates picked their watches, each choosing in turn the man whom he judged likeliest to be the best sailor. The mate had planned to take Mungle for his first choice. Now he said to the second mate, "I'll take that man at the wheel." For he supposed that if Mungle were no good as a helmsman he would be no good at anything else. Thinking as the mate did, the second picked one of the others. The skipper came to look on then. Had he not done so the mate would have taken Mungle next. He hardly liked to pick him now with the skipper watching, so took another. The second mate skipped Mungle again. And so it went till Mungle alone was left.

The second mate took charge of the first night watch, from eight till midnight. The wind had freshened, and the ship was steering hard. "You, Mungle! Get to the wheel!" he ordered, and added, "I'll teach you to steer, by gad!"

Up to the wheel again went Mungle, while the mate's men, with Carlsen amongst them, went off duty. Pretty soon the second mate said, "I ought to have taken this fellow Mungle for my first pick. I guess he'd had a drop too much booze. He's a fine helmsman."

When the watches were changed at midnight, Mungle, instead of going to his bunk to turn in, sought Carlsen. The moon was high and full. The skipper had gone below long ago. The second mate was gone. The mate was on the poop.

Without a word Mungle strode up to and struck Carlsen. As they had fought before, they fought again. A deck house hid them from the mate, but he came down from the poop in a minute or two to take a walk round the decks and see that all was as it should be. He had supposed that their first fight had been only a quarrel between two boozy sailors. Now he said, to himself, "Rivalry's a good thing to have between the watches." He stepped between them and said, "There's a better way to settle any quarrel you two fools have. From now on let's see who heads the best watch. Get to your bunk, Mungle!"

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So Mungle went to his bunk, saying to himself, "The mate's right. I'll show that squarehead pig up!"

Day by day after that it was run and jump with Mungle, trying to prove himself a better watch leader than Carlsen. Carlsen took no notice of him at all, but went about his work complacently, doing everything in first rate style.

The Spaniard saw Mungle's hate for Carlsen, and, wanting to curry favor with him, being afraid of him, came to him one dark night. "Meestaire, you see!" said he, and drew his knife. "You says so, and I stick my knife in the big man some dark night, eh?"

"You dirty dog!" said Mungle, and shook the Spaniard till his teeth rattled.

Then one dark night the Spaniard went to Carlsen, drew out his knife, showed it to him, and said, "I sticks the knife in the Englishman, eh?"

Carlsen grasped the knife and flung it overboard. "You makes again sooch foolish talks I tells zee mate," said he. And neither Mungle nor Carlsen spoke of the Spaniard to the other.

WHEN she had been a week at sea the ship ran into dirty weather. Then you should have seen Mungle run and jump, and haul, and furl, trying to show himself a smarter seaman than Carlsen. Carlsen noticed him and said, "Zee Englishman ees goot sailor. Me too, I am ze goot sailor. Vee shows dem now!"

"See those two fellows handle that sail, eh, mister?" said the mate one day to the second mate, while the two were rolling up a topsail high aloft. Mungle was first to come down to the deck, and to him the mate said, "You're a cracking good hand, Mungle!"

Mungle grinned. "There's one fer the squarehead pig!" he thought. But next moment Carlsen dropped from the rigging to the deck, and the mate said, "Carlsen, you're a first rate sailor. I've never seen a better." Mungle's face went black.

"Dere ees goot sailor too, sir," said Carlsen, with a nod toward Mungle.

"The condescendin' squarehead pig!" muttered Mungle, boiling with rage.

Mungle went to the wheel. The ship was plunging in a high sea, and steering her hardest. It took every ounce of his strength to hold her. And, seeing him straining, the skipper called to him from the chart room doorway, "D'ye want a man at the lee wheel to help you?" Mungle shook his head, belligerently. But, noticing that a black squall was coming up, the skipper, despite him, ordered Carlsen, who was coiling a rope up near the wheel, to go help him. So Carlsen stepped to the lee wheel and set his big paws on the spokes.

Mungle had not heard the skipper's order to Carlsen. Now, aware that the ship was steering easier, he looked up and saw him at the lee wheel. Thinking that the Swede had come to help him unordered he reached out a hand and as the ship rolled hard down to lee gave him a shove that sent him sprawling.

The skipper had not seen Mungle's action, and, seeing Carlsen prostrate on the deck, supposed that he had slipped and fallen as any sailor may.

Mungle's face was dead white with anger. The skipper saw it, and, supposing that its pallor was caused by the effort of holding the hard-steering ship, shouted to Carlsen, "You take the weather helm and steer her. You're stouter than that little fellow. He can take the lee wheel and help you."

So Mungle had to turn the respon-

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sibility of steering over to Carlsen and to go to the lee wheel and act merely as his helper.

When, after two hours, Mungle and Carlsen were relieved by two others, they started forward together along the water-swept deck, with the ship pitching and rolling hard. They were not yet halfway along the deck when a big sea came over the bulwarks and knocked Mungle from his feet. Carlsen reached out a big paw, clutched him, and hauled him from the water.

"Heverything plays into the hands of the big pig," muttered Mungle savagely, as, sea-soaked and shivering, he followed the complacent Swede.

That night while Carlsen was on the lookout in the bow all hands were hauling on the main braces. Mungle was nearest to the brace blocks, when a mountainous sea came roaring toward the ship. Every one but he let go the rope and ran. As the water thundered aboard he was entirely submerged, and, what was much worse, his right hand was drawn into the block and crushed between the sheave and the shell. Had it not been for the mate, who got hold of the rope just in time to save it from slipping further, his hand would have been smashed. The mate took him to the forecastle, looked at his bruised fingers, and said, "You'll have to lay up, Mungle."

"Not me! I ain't no furriner pig, sir!" said Mungle. And back to work he went, determined not to give in while Carlsen was still strong and fit. Soon afterward Carlsen came down from lookout.

Again a sea roared over the bulwarks, flooding the deck shoulder-deep. Save for Mungle and Carlsen all the crew ran. Gripping a stanchion with one hand, Carlsen flung his other arm round Mungle and held him fast. Mungle was quite submerged, but, hating Carlsen, struggled and cursed. When the deck cleared he looked up at him and screamed savagely, "I'm going to take the chantey out of ye yet, see if I don't!"

"Vott ees?" asked the amazed Carlsen. "Vott I haf done?" Muttering to himself, Mungle made no answer.

THE gale abated that night, and all the following week light winds blew. Mungle and Carlsen worked in the rigging; and, despite Mungle's hurt fingers, both men's splices were perfection. But while the Swede's manner was complacent, the little Englishman looked sour. Sometimes when they met the big Swede beamed amicably down at him.

"Wait!" muttered Mungle to himself, "just wait! I'm going to get even wi' ye yet!"

And one day when Carlsen had just passed by him he said half-aloud, "I wishes I'd let the dago stick his knife in ye!" But he had no more than said it when he thought, "Hold on, there! Don't go running away wiv yerself, Mungle, me lad!" And, ashamed of the half-uttered thought, he spat. And he didn't know that the Spaniard, passing close after Carlsen, had heard him. That night was moony, and the next, and the next.

The fourth night came in squally and dark, and at midnight all hands were called to furl the foresail. Last man to come down the rigging after the sail was furled was Carlsen. Just ahead of Carlsen, the Spaniard came; and just ahead of the Spaniard came Mungle. All the rest were gone to the quarterdeck when these three came down the dark rigging.

Just as Mungle jumped from the

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rigging to the deck the ship trembled to the onrush of a great sea sweeping up to top her bulwarks. Instead of hurrying after the others, Mungle ran close in under the bulwarks to let it pass harmlessly over him. As it swept down to the lee scuppers he looked up and in the dim light saw the Spaniard standing on top of the bulwark, a little to one side as though to let Carlsen pass by him. But he saw also that in the Spaniard's hand was a knife. And instantly he knew that the Spaniard planned to knife the big Swede and heave him to the sea. No one would ever know but that Carlsen had fallen overboard!

Mungle's hand closed on the Spaniard's ankle, and he jerked him to the deck just as another sea broke over the bulwarks. Then, while they were swept across the dark deck together, Carlsen dropped from the rigging and hurried to the quarterdeck.

"Ye dirty yellow dog!" screamed Mungle, and shaking the Spaniard as a terrier shakes a rat, beat him and kicked him. Flinging him down at last he followed the others.

A few evenings later Mungle, on his way to the wheel, passed by the open door of the forecastle. He had been sitting alone in the bow, sullenly brooding because that day he had overheard the mate say to the skipper, "If Mungle was as beefy as the big Swede there'd be nothing to choose between them. As it is, the Swede would be the best man in a tight place."

Except for Carlsen and one other all the crew were sitting on the hatch, yarning. Those two were in the forecastle. Carlsen stood before the other man, who was seated on his sea chest. And in Carlsen's hand was a flag, which he was holding up for the other to see. At the moment that Mungle looked in he was saying, "Zee flag of mine country. Alvays ven I go to sea I takes mig me zee flag of mine country."

"You there, Mungle! Get to the wheel!" called the mate, seeing Mungle dawdling at the forecastle door. So with no time to snatch the foreign flag from Carlsen and throw it to the sea Mungle merely spat on it and hurried off.

"Ah, dat ees dee mooch bad ting," said Carlsen. "Int vould I on Eenglish flag spit! Vat ees matter mig heem?"

FIRST thing next morning the mate sent Mungle to the forepeak to roll a barrel of salt pork from the tiers of barrels stored there to beneath the hatch, where it would be handy to hoist to the deck later. The Spaniard was already down in the forepeak, having been sent there to put a coil of rope away. He was sitting in a dark corner, fingering his knife and thinking of Mungle. When he saw Mungle come down the hatch he slipped noiselessly farther into the dark corner.

His eyes not yet accustomed to the gloom, Mungle set his hands on the first barrel he came to; without noticing that it was so stowed that if it were moved a whole tier of barrels would be displaced.

"I'll show 'em I'm as strong as any lousy squarehead!" he muttered, and gave the barrel a heave. Next instant he was on his back, powerless to move, with a barrel on his chest and another on his legs; and behind those two a half dozen others that threatened at any minute to roll upon him. He tried to shout for help and could not, because of the weight on him. And then he was aware of some one else in the forepeak.

"'Elp me, matey! 'Urry up and 'elp me!" he gasped.

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The Spaniard scowled down at Mungle. "Meestaire Eenglishman, I pay my score now," said he. "I leave the barrels to crush you."

"Leave 'em, ye dirty dog!" muttered Mungle, and closed his eyes. Waiting to be crushed he thought, "I 'aven't no luck! I wanted ter be even wiv the square'ead."

Unseen by the Spaniard a big barefooted sailor dropped silently down the hatch. Carlsen was come to get a piece of spunyarn wherewith to make a new lanyard for his marlinspike. For a moment or so he stood beneath the hatch, to accustom his eyes to the gloom. And then he heard Mungle's voice, "Kill me, ye dirty rat! W'y don't ye kill me if yer goin' to?"

And he heard the Spaniard's reply, "I enjoy to see you die slowly, meestaire Eenglishman. In a minute now the barrels will roll and crush you."

With a swing of his long arm, Carlsen sent the Spaniard sprawling. Then, as though they had been ninepins, he hove the barrels away from Mungle.

Powerless to move, Mungle remained still. "Ees you hurt, mine vren?" asked Carlsen, and bent above him, and took one of his hands and chafed it between his big palms.

Mungle drew his hand away and rolled over on his face. Sobs shook him.

"Ah, you ees hurt, mine vren!" cried Carlsen, and, stepping to beneath the hatch, shouted for the mate.

"What's up?" asked the mate, dropping into the peak. And Carlsen replied, "Moongle ees mooch hurt, sir."

"I ain't 'urt, sir," gasped Mungle, defiantly, and tried to rise. He couldn't rise. So Carlsen lifted him and carried him up to the deck and laid him in his bunk.

The skipper came to look at Mungle, and went away saying, "I reckon his ribs must be broken. Maybe they'll mend if he lays up."

Mungle was left alone in the forecastle. Sobs shook him. Once when Carlsen came in to look at him he said fiercely, "Go away, will yer? Get out of 'ere! Can't yer leave a man alone?"

When the perplexed Carlsen was gone Mungle said, "If any man was ever to spit on th' old Duster I'd leave the blighter die, yer bet!"

For many days Mungle lay in his bunk, and grew no stronger. "It's something more than just cracked ribs," said the skipper.

ON a black night some ten days after Mungle was hurt a squall of hurricane force caught the ship under full sail, and snapped her three topmasts short off. As she lurched, unmanageable in the wild sea, the wreckage tore away her bulwarks along one side. With them gone, the waves that swept her deck smashed in her hatches, so that water began to pour into her. Water leaked in also through one of her side plates, pierced by a fallen mast that swung against it. When the mates shouted for the crew, Carlsen a one answered.

While the mates drove the others to the pumps, Carlsen worked alone; cutting the wreckage away, swinging an ax in the darkness and slashing with his knife. Till dawn the mates pumped with the crew. And then, with no time taken for food or rest, they pumped all day; and pumping their hardest just managed to keep the water from gaining in the ship. All day no one but Carlsen remembered Mungle. Carlsen ran twice to the forecastle and set sea biscuit by him and held water to his lips. He looked at Carlsen dolefully.

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"Ye gets all the luck, Square'ead!" he said, and Carlsen replied, "Int I know vot goes to happen mig sheep. But I look out for you, you bets!"

Night came, and still the mates kept the weary men at the pumps. Maybe the wind would ease and the sea fall before another day. Then there would be time for rest. As night fell the second mate fetched biscuit and gave some to each man, bidding him eat as he pumped. That night Carlsen also pumped. And as he pumped he sang. Hour after hour he sang, his deep voice defiant above the noise of wind and sea.

At a couple of hours after midnight a sea yet greater than any of the great seas that had from time to time rolled over the decks thundered aboard. And when it had passed there was no longer any sound of singing. And there was no longer audible the *clank-clank* of the pumps.

At first no one replied to the mate's shout. Then, as the wind lulled, the voices of weary men answered him. Save for Carlsen, the crew gathered about him. "The blow's over," he said. "The gale's blown itself out. Where's the second mate? Where's Carlsen?"

They found the second mate jammed under a stanchion, bruised and half-drowned. They carried him up to the chart room, where the skipper was. Then the mate shouted for Carlsen again and again. There was no answer from the utter dark. So the mate went to the skipper and said, "Carlsen's gone over the side, sir."

The skipper looked at the mate, and the mate at the skipper. The same thought was in the mind of each. With Carlsen gone it would no longer be possible to keep the worn-out crew at work, no longer be of any use to try to save the ship.

"Get the boat cleared away, mister. We'll have to leave her," said the skipper.

They s ing the boat out. When they had car l the second mate into her the sk r said to the mate, "Send two n o fetch Mungle, mister."

Two men started toward the forecastle to fetch Mungle. But before they were halfway there the ship gave a lurch that made them think she was going to sink. So one said to the other, "Say, ain't the forecastle been washed overboard, eh?" And the other at once replied, "Aye. The forecastle's gone. It ain't no good to look for Mungle. He's drowned." And without having come within thirty feet of the forecastle they ran back to the waiting boat and told the skipper that the forecastle was over the side. They leaped into the boat. The mate followed them. The skipper followed the mate.

All the wind was knocked clear out of Carlsen by that great sea that swept him from his feet. The ship pitched just after the sea boarded her, so that the water on her deck ran forward, carrying him with it, and banging him against stanchions and bitts. When he came to his senses he was far up in the bow. There was a terrible pain in his side. One arm was well nigh useless. One of his ankles hurt him horribly. But he managed to get to his feet, and he at once made for the forecastle to see if Mungle was still there.

"Hello, Square'ead!" called Mungle from his bunk. "Is the old hooker going to sink? W'y don't ye get out on deck so's to 'ave a chance ter swim round fer a time anyway?"

THERE was no answer. Carlsen had fallen unconscious to the deck.

"Good ol' Square'ead! He's a' goin'

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ter swim round fer a bit," thought Mungle, and tried to get from his bunk that he also might be saved from drowning like a rat in the forecastle. He managed to get to his feet, but couldn't get to the door. So he sat down on a sea chest, in the dark, and waited for the ship to sink. He sat there till dawn came streaking through the portholes, and then saw Carlsen.

"Well, jigger me if here ain't Square-'ead!" cried Mungle, and bent above Carlsen and took one of his big hands and chafed it. "'Ee's all crippled up an' looks like 'ee was bloomin' well done fer," said he.

Carlsen opened his eyes and smiled up at Mungle. "Vat ees, mine vren?" he asked dully.

"The old hooker's agoin' ter sink, chum," said Mungle. "D'yer think yer could make it out to the deck?"

Carlsen reached for the edge of the table and dragged himself laboriously to his feet. "I helps you to zee deck, Moongle," said he.

"No yer don't. I 'elps you, Square-'ead," retorted Mungle.

They put their arms around each other. Together they opened the door. Together they tottered out to the deck. Sea and wind had fallen. The ship was very low in the water.

"Now den, ve to der poop go, mine vren," said Carlsen, and, both limping, both with pain in their faces and both trying to hide their pain from the other, they started toward the poop. It took them a long time to get there, but they made it at last.

"Gude," said Carlsen, when they were come to the head of the poop ladder. "Now den, better you rest she."

"Aye, sit down an' rest fer a bit, chum. It'll be good fer yer," said Mungle.

Side by side they sat at the head of the poop ladder, each with his face turned from the other lest his pain be seen. They rose bye and bye, helping each other up with much effort, and made their slow way to the cabin skylight. There they sat again.

Presently Mungle turned to Carlsen. Carlsen's head was fallen to his breast. His eyes were closed.

"Pore ol' Square'ead's dyin'," thought Mungle. He rose and, wincing with pain, laid Carlsen lengthwise on the skylight.

Mungle looked down at Carlsen, and a sob shook him. Then, as though he had heard, Carlsen opened his eyes and looked up.

"Now den, eef I could, I would help you, mine vren," murmured Carlsen.

"I'd do anything for yer, old chum," said Mungle.

And then suddenly Mungle straightened and gazed along the deck toward the forecastle. A look of resolve came to his wan face. He hobbled slowly to the head of the poop ladder and contrived to lower himself laboriously down it to the quarterdeck. It took him a long time to get to the forecastle, but he made it at last.

Mungle hobbled slowly past Carlsen's bunk, thrust his hand beneath the straw pillow, and brought out the Swedish flag. He tucked the flag under his jumper and made his way wearily back to the poop.

Mungle hobbled slowly past Carlsen and looked up to where there fluttered at halfmast the Duster, so hoisted upon the preceding day as a distress signal. He lowered it, unbent it from the halliards, and in its place made fast the Swedish flag. Then he hobbled back to Carlsen.

"Square'ead, old pal! Square'ead!" said Mungle.

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Carlsen opened his eyes.

"See wot's at the mast'ead, chum!" said Mungle, pointing.

Carlsen looked up, and saw the Swedish flag. "Now den, I t'ank you, mine vren," he murmured, and closed his eyes again.

Mungle lifted Carlsen's head and pillowed it upon the Duster. "It ain't much of a piller, chum, but it's the finest I kin give yer," said he.

Mungle lay down on the deck beneath Carlsen, and closed his eyes.

For a time Mungle and Carlsen lay motionless. Then suddenly Mungle opened his eyes and sat up. A steamer lay close by on the still sea, and beside the slowly sinking ship was one of the steamer's boats. Her chief mate stood above Carlsen and Mungle.

"What sort of a distress signal do you call that?" asked the steamer's mate. "A foreign flag at the masthead of a Liverpool ship, eh?"

"That ain't no distress signal, sir," said Mungle. "That there flag means as all's well aboard this 'ere ship."

Carlsen opened his eyes and tried to sit up. "Yah, sir. All's vell now," said he.

THE END

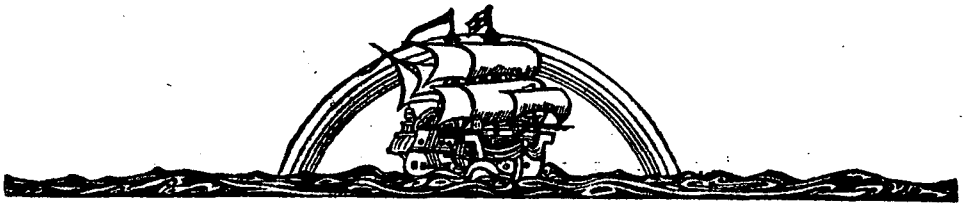
The Most Useless Animal

HANGING by its toenails from the limb of a tall tree, the South American sloth presents a picture of almost complete uselessness, even to itself. Unequipped by Nature with any offensive weapons, it moves like a slow-motion film and is scarcely able to cover more than fifty paces a day. It is lucky for the sloth that, swaying gently in the wind, its resemblance to a bunch of leaves is heightened by the green plant growths on its back. The sloth, in other words, gathers moss.

In construction the sloth resembles a woolly English sheep dog except that it has a long neck, while its head is a mere bulb. Its face shows no expression. It lives on coarse leaves, and is not good to eat. The sloth seems to lead a dull life, since it pays little attention to anything, even another sloth. Mating is desultory at best. Fighting is rare, although the females occasionally take listless slaps at one another. The squeals of their young attract some attention, though the adult is not always able to find them in a hurry. Approaching boa constrictors, jaguars, or harpy eagles do not frighten them much. A gun fired at close range will not make them jump. Long immersion in water annoys them.

As a matter of fact their hides and fur are so dense that claws of eagles and teeth of jaguars will not always penetrate. Furthermore, so tightly does the sloth cling to its branch that the attacker often finds him a tough proposition.

—*Delos White*



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The Naked Blade

By GEORGE CHALLIS

For freebooting Ivor Kildare, there was more to be won from the Spanish Main than golden loot

Buccaneers boarded the Hispaniola like rushing flames

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was upon his escape from the Spanish-American town of Porto Bello that the Englishman, Ivor Kildare, left his beauteous but proudly aloof lady, Ines Heredia, in the care of her guardian, Señor Larreta. Mistaking Kildare for a bloody-handed buccaneer known as Captain Tranquillo, the vengeful citizens of Porto Bello had almost taken his life.

And so, followed by a faithful Indian, Luis, Kildare made his way to the Island of Tortuga. There he hoped to be able to win over a wild, ill-assorted rabble of beef-killers and ne'er-do-wells, followers of the real Captain Tranquillo, by the promise of loot and plunder in Havana Harbor. His purpose was to take the great ship Hispaniola, filled with valuable cargo, which would soon sail for Porto Bello.

For this ship and its cargo belonged to a Spaniard named Pedro Alvarado, known by Kildare to be the fiancé of the fair Ines Heredia.

He succeeded in his purpose, at least to the extent of sword-whipping the real Tranquillo, stripping him of his gaudy finery and his gold, and winning over his rabble. Tranquillo fled, and as soon as he was gone, Kildare organized his expedition to Havana. He bought boats; he assigned the crew to their places. There was Pierre Chaptal, the "ship's surgeon"; there was Dutch Peter, the ship's carpenter; and there were other good men, as staunch and faithful as

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these, to whom he gave positions of equal importance.

CHAPTER XI (*Continued*).

"HAVANA!"

THE noisy stream of buccaneers was flowing down toward the wharves, now. Kildare took two men to the merchants' warehouse and turned the rest of Tranquillo's gold into leaden bullets and Norman powder; and when he returned, he found that the loading of the two boats was almost finished. Counting Luis and himself, there were thirty-nine men, all told. None of the other townsmen or buccaneers offered to join; only those who had first fallen under the spell of wine and Kildare's tongue were entering the boats, for to the others this looked like a far cry and a small crew. But Kildare's sworn men had gone ahead with the arrangements in a precise and capable way. When Kildare and Luis entered the smaller boat and gave the signal, twenty-two men were in the larger periagua; fifteen were in the canoa.

At once they pushed off, and a great cry went up from those who remained on the wharf. A stillness came upon Kildare's mind; the whole picture entered into him, never to be dimmed. Most of the townsmen began to cheer and wave; a few were singing drunken songs; but quite a number felt the pull of the parting moment, and yelled out for the boats to wait—they, also, would join the expedition. They stood on the edge of the wharf with angry faces, clamoring. But beyond the wharf, on the beach, with the children prancing with excitement, were the negro wenches and the pretty half-breed girls, following down the sands, holding out their arms and calling on their lovers by name. All of these had a single gesture of despair; and in the end, they dropped down on their knees, held their arms over their heads and faces, and so remained, bowing up and down in their grief.

It was the golden time of the late afternoon, when the oars were manned and the expedition started, with the periagua in the lead. That gray wolf of a Norman, Chaptal, had been chosen by common assent to handle the periagua, but with Kildare went as steersman the best sailor in the little fleet, Dutch Peter. Across a bay covered with golden oil they moved, the blades of the oars leaving swirls of purple behind.

They cleared the harbor, with Kildare already laboring at an oar as heartily as any common hand; for the fire was burning up in him. These other fellows were laboring for the fun of a battle, for the money they could make from the prize, and finally for the long brandy debauch in Tortuga or Port Royal that would follow. But to Kildare, the goal was far away, under the stifling mists of Porto Bello. Ines Heredia was there in the coolness of a patio, with the sound of running water near her and the dark hands of Angela moving the fan; and here, in the far sea, were two-score men rowing into the darkness, set in motion for her sake.

The thought pleased Kildare; the indirectness and the mystery of it.

Half a moon came out of the eastern ocean; a red torch that presently burned silver white.

HOUR by hour they rowed on into the night, now silent, now breaking into the short chorus of a French boat-song. Presently, two men

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shipped their oars, worked forward, and fell asleep in the bows. And after a time they came back to their places, and two more rested. There were no complaints; no man grumbled at the length of his shift; no man suggested lying on the oars for a breathing space; there seemed to be one mind among them all. At least, all knew that they had barely eight days to make The Havana, and there were two hundred and fifty leagues of weary salt water between them and that goal. It was well after midnight before a favorable wind darkened the path of the moon, struck the sail they spread, and made the oars unnecessary. They ate bread, drank wine, and fell asleep, all except Kildare and Dutch Peter.

"A good beginning is half the voyage," said Dutch Peter.

But he was wrong. They had wind enough most of the time, but they had rain also; so much of it that the clothing began to rot on their bodies. And when they raised Cape St. Nicholas, on the eastern end of Cuba, such a storm struck them that they scudded before it, working the oars desperately to keep the pointed stern of the canoa to the wind.

They whipped by the mouth of Baracoa Harbor in a squall that covered them with twilight, and they could barely make out Baracoa's one lofty hill. Twelve leagues further the storm blew them with one long, screaming gust, until they saw the single palm tree that stood like a sail on the flat point of Moa. There the wind left them for half a day, the sky cleared, the sun turned the sea to fire, and the old sailors put grease on their lips and on the lower lids of their eyes, while they labored again at the oars.

In faint winds or none at all, the two boats kept company to the triple rock of Camoloquea. Then another storm struck them, and when Kildare's boat passed the island of Cropeda, there was no sight of the other craft. His canoa was half filled with water, despite the constant bailing; the periagua might be sunk, for all he knew. But laboring straight onward with the oars, presently they raised a speck before them and found the periagua once again.

They passed the point of Matanzas, where the periagua drew alongside and asked for water. Chaptal had filled the cask with rain water, of course, but the sea had entered the cask also, when a great wave almost buried the little boat. Yet they gave Chaptal water and rowed on. That was the only time during the course of the voyage that one boat spoke to the other.

From Point Matanzas they had to creep in close to the shore, in order to avoid the great current which sweeps the coast and bears into the northeast, but though they lost the sea wind a great part of the time, land breezes helped them.

So they came at last, on the evening of the seventh day, to a rock and a shoal. Beyond the rock was a low hill, running east and west, with two hummocks on top of it.

"'Havana!" cried Luis, whose eyes were the sharpest of all.

They lay on their oars at that, and broke into cheering. Chaptal's boat picked up the shout.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE MAN IS MINE!"

THEY would wait off the harbor's mouth and try to pick up the ship when it sailed the next day. There were very few leagues to go;

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therefore all rowing ended, while a favorable breeze came off the land and pushed the two boats steadily on their way.

Kildare took the helm. Luis squatted cross-legged before him. Out of the bottom of the canoa arose the snoring of the men; snoring in many keys, like the squealing of pigs, big and little, when they are hungry for food.

Happiness filled Kildare. The finery he had taken from Captain Tranquillo had been rolled in a tarpaulin, long ago. He stood at the steering oar in a short pair of breeches only, his wiry body as naked as a plucked crow's, while the tropical sea-air flowed over his skin like water. Off on his starboard, the canvas of the periagua was pale with starlight. All went well, and he had little to do with the steering oar, except when a stronger wave tossed the canoa and made it jump like a horse that rises to a barrier and sails far before it strikes the smooth turf again.

The quiet voice of Luis spoke. He said:

"Master, it is not the gold that you are thinking of."

"It is the gold," said Kildare. "And gold that you have seen, too. Do you remember the roof of Larreta's house in Porto Bello? Do you remember the room of the girl, and how her hair shone like metal?"

"All this for a mere woman?" said Luis. Then he began to laugh, gently, having the sleepers in mind. "Well," he said at last, "I have sailed with the English before this!"

They were off The Havana before that night ended. The current bore them northeast, and the wind bore them southwest. They had hardly to touch an oar in order to keep in place, but all the while the two boats were gradually turning, not in the same rhythm, but as though they were governed by two wildly differing clocks.

Then, in the sudden, wild flush of the dawn, a fleet of fishing boats blew out of the harbor mouth. The sun came up. They saw clearly the great rock that tells the mariner of the Havana harbor, and the little shining white tower on the top of it.

As the sail of a fishing boat inclined toward them, sweeping on like half of a gleaming bubble, Kildare had the oars manned, and slid the canoa towards the little craft. There were three men in the boat who at the last moment screamed out, and tried to put about. But the canoa caught them with ease, as a big fish catches a lesser. Luis picked the oldest of those three men out of the fishing boat and put him down before Kildare.

The poor old withered Indian had no strength in his knees. He dropped before Kildare, lifted his face toward the sky, shut his eyes tight, and prayed aloud that God would not permit the wild men of the sea to eat him alive! Kildare took him by the chin, jerked his mouth ajar, and set a silver coin between his teeth.

Something about the feel of it brought back the Indian's wits. He dropped the coin into his hand, looked from it to Kildare, and then began to smile like a child.

"CAN you stand up?" asked Kildare.

"Yes, my lord," said the Indian, and rose to his feet.

"If you answer my questions truly, you will live and return to your people. If you lie, we shall burn you between the fingers and the toes.—Now, then, do you know of a ship in the harbor called the Hispaniola?"

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"No, lord," said the Indian, gravely and instantly.

"She was not there when you came out this morning?"

"No, lord."

All the blood in Kildare's body leaped into his brain.

"You never have seen her?" he muttered, hopelessly.

"Yes, lord."

"You *have* seen her?"

"She was lying in the harbor on the eastern side for three weeks."

"And when did she sail?"

"Last night, when the wind was fair for the west. Toward New Spain she sailed."

"Last night!" said Kildare. "Luis, throw him back into his boat. Quickly! Lads, pull away for the west. In such a wind as this, God will not let us miss the Spaniard! Luis, stand up and shout the news!"

They left the fishing boat drifting with the current. And the old man, restored to his friends with a silver coin in the grasp of each hand, was felt and handled cautiously by his two companions, as though they expected him to fall to pieces each moment, after his recent visit to the dragons.

In the meantime, Luis's trumpet cry informed Chaptal of the news. Yells of angry resolution broke from the buccaneers. It was a sin and a Spanish trick for the Hispaniola to sail by night! Straightway, a man made a vow. He got up and tore the shirt from his back, and swore that he would never wear clothes above his hips until he walked the deck of the Hispaniola. That was a dangerous vow to make, considering the strength of the tropic sun.

Another man sprang up in the periagua, to yell that he would never taste wine till a cask was broached on the Hispaniola. Then, in a fury, the crew fell to the long labor of the pursuit. Over the cedar thwarts they thrust the long oars, and through the grummets or against the tholes of twisted manatee hide, they pulled with all their might, driving westward ho! The wind helped them a little; the oars helped them more.

But when all the wind died down, under the pouring fire of the sun they labored westward up the endless blue hills and the short, swinging valleys of the sea.

IT was the hawk-like eye of Luis that spotted the sail at last. He shouted and pointed. They all saw it, then—a little blue-white form above the edge of the sea. It might have been a cloud, except that its edges were too sharp.

The thing grew. It rose magically out of the becalmed ocean, a tall three-master, with all her sails hanging helplessly down, like the wrinkled, flabby cheeks of an aged woman.

They walked up on her, hand over hand, while the sails turned from blue to white and the hull mounted out of the ocean.

"She's a good one," said Dutch Peter. "I like the look of her, and the rake of the masts. She's sound and new, too, I'll warrant. She's all of the best, or my nose cannot smell her. She has good oak for her timbers, straight and curved and knee. She's planked with elm or beech, below the water line. All the hemp of her will be good Riga band!—And now she sees us, and gets ready to show her teeth!"

Out went the flags and streamers of the tall ship, and the great colors. The sprit-sails disappeared; the main-sail was furled and slung. The close-fights,

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a heavy wall of canvas, were set up all the length of the deck, a wall against boarders; and as the ship heaved on the swell of the sea, the watchers could see that the deck was being covered with canvas, also, to prevent the damage made by falling spars, in the course of a battle.

While the oars were groaning, Kildare stood up in the stern sheets and called out his instructions.

"Are you thirsty, lads?" he called. "There's our tavern. But we'll pay for our drinks before we enter her doors."

His voice seemed greater than his body. As he shouted, all the bones of his chest and ribs were showing. But if his body was lean, so was his sword, and they knew what *that* could do. He looked like a fever-starved beggar, but they knew that he was a man.

"Put your best marksmen in the bows, Chaptal," he called, "and let 'em rest from the rowing so that their hands won't be trembling. Steersmen, keep your boats in line with the Spaniard's masts. He'll have only his stern chasers to use on us, then.

"We ought to have our teeth in this fellow in short order, and the best of him down our throats. There is no wind for him to yaw by and give us the whole weight of his guns. He can only warp her about with his boats, as he's doing now; and that's a murderous slow business, as he'll soon find out. But we have no long time for this work. Look north and west, where that thunderhead begins to crawl up out of the sea! There'll be a wind before long, friends; and perhaps there'll be so much of it that we'll want to dance on something bigger than our own decks!"

He broke off, waved his hand, and they gave him one brief yell of approval as they rowed. In Kildare's own boat, the men shifted automatically. The best marksmen were perfectly well known, it seemed. These experts gathered into the bows, looking to their long-barreled muskets, and sometimes trying the sights long before the ship was in range.

DUTCH PETER steered well off to the starboard, trying to keep the three masts of the ship in line so that the broadside would not bear. The rowers, in the meantime, put out their best efforts. That thunderhead which crawled out on the sky like a black smoke told them that the season for fighting might be very short. They hastened to make the most of every minute. They stood up to strain at the oars, and finished each stroke by sitting down with a thump on the benches. The canoa jumped at every impulse. Some one started a French boating song, which the whole crew took up with a roar. Even the boat seemed to do better with music to help her. The waves slapped her bows in a more rapid rhythm; the wake spun out more swiftly behind. And Ivor Kildare stood up in the sternsheets, laughing for joy, holding up that bright splinter of a sword.

He gave a foxhunter's halloo.

"Brave hearts, jolly boys!" shouted Kildare. "Now a last run, and at them. They cannot wear ship as quickly as we can dodge 'em. We'll be in, and have them by the heels. We'll hamstring these Spanish beeves, and cut their throats while they bellow.—Make in! Make in! Give way!—*Hai!* They have missed now, and they'll miss again."

Perhaps the commander of the Spanish ship felt that it was vain to bring his ship around by the head

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quickly enough to use a broadside. At any rate, he gave the first blast from the stern-ports. Four shot, great and small, plumped into the water well ahead of Kildare; and where they fell, the sea leaped up in green sheets. The buccaneers yelled loudly, and pressed on.

The flag of Spain was loosed over the stern of the ship, rippling down to the full of its length and there hanging in the windless air as though painted on the blue of the sea. The Spanish gunners were laboring desperately to reload as soon as possible, so that they might pour in a second volley. The buccaneers stood on their oars, giving up the best of their strength and the last of their breath, with a barking yell at the end of each stroke.

Murmurs, then shouts of joy broke out from the boats. For the more sharp-sighted had now been able to spell out the golden letters of the ship's name. Kildare, making out the dim gilding of the name, pinched his lips together and drew a breath. An armada loaded to the rails with precious stones was nothing to him compared with his hope of finding on the Hispaniola his lady's betrothed.

The buccaneers began to spring on the oars as though their lives depended on their work. Dutch Peter suddenly threw his steering oar to starboard; the sharp bows of the canoa veered far off to the port, as the Spaniards tried a second volley. Some small shot ripped into the sea in front of the canoa; the big round shot tore the air well above the heads of the buccaneers. And as they saw what Peter's maneuvering had saved them, they yelled at the pitch of their throats, then ran the boat straight in, in furious silence.

No wind struck the Spaniard, but such a frenzy of excitement, and such shouting, burst from her, such a scurrying of men aloft into the round tops, that she trembled like a living thing—like a stag bogged in mud when the hounds come swiftly up on it.

Through the rear ports, as the gunners labored to reload, as the long ramrods jerked back and forth, Kildare could see the white gleam of the faces, so near had they drawn.

"Now, fire!" he called to his musketeers. "Lie on your oars, lads. Fire, musketeers, while the boat's still running. Fire before she's lost her way and feels the pitch of the sea!"

THE oarsmen lay on the long sweeps, twisting about to look over their shoulders at the game. Dutch Peter held her true on the course. And in a quick cluster, the bowsmen fired.

Through the shadows within the ports, Kildare could see the gunners struck into confusion; but more than seeing was the yell of woe and pain that sounded at them like a horn across the waters. Two of the rearmost of the Spaniard's larboard guns fired, as though in aimless spite. The bullets skipped across the water far from the quarry. It made the buccaneers whoop with joy to see this vain bowling when they themselves should have been ninepins. But Dutch Peter shouted: "Starboard! Starboard!—Starboard hard!"

He flung the steering oar over, but it was too late. A single cannon spoke from the ship, when the head of the canoa had barely begun to swing.

A dark streak flew at them.

"Flat!—Fall flat!" thundered Dutch Peter. The ruin struck them as he spoke. A big shot clove through the bows as they tossed on a wave. It struck off the arm of one man at the

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shoulder, dashed through the body of another, and nipped off the head of the oarsman just in front of Kildare. The red blood flew in a fine spray—a thin red cloud that was snatched away by the wind. The boat lay wallowing; and a groan came up from the crew.

The man who had lost his arm stood up in the bows with the blood spouting from his shoulder.

"Go on, my hearts!" he called. "Wine and gold for all of you! Overboard with the dead hulks, and the living get on. *Adieu!*"

He picked up a heavy musket, hugged it to his breast with his remaining arm, and leaped from the boat before any one could prevent him. The weight of the gun dragged him straight down, his course marked by a long red streak and by many bubbles.

His name was Pierre. He was a young buccaneer, hardly a year from the floggings and the hard usage of his apprentice term. But he was a wild and merry companion, already famed for his delicate marksmanship. His death sent the others into a frenzy, and they hurled the two dead men over the side, gripped the oars anew, and shot their craft straight in at the cheering Spaniards.

"No quarter!" they groaned.

The sight of their swift coming brought a confusion of yells from the Spaniards. A number of small pieces were let off from the tops and from the stern ports; but not a whit of damage was done by this close fire. And the ports were closed instantly afterwards, for the gunners preferred barring the way to boarders to trying another shot.

AS they came near enough to mark the pattern of the carved work over the stern of the ship, Kildare stood up and shouted in that voice which he knew how to make greater than his body:

"Pedro Alvarado!—Pedro Alvarado!"

Almost instantly, there appeared above the roundhouse of the Spaniard a tall youth with yellow hair that flowed down over his shoulders. Even from that distance, it seemed to Kildare that he could see the blue of the man's eyes, too. He looked more like the brother than the lover of Ines Heredia.

"I am Pedro Alvarado, in the name of God!" cried the big blond young man.

Kildare called to his men, "Mark him, brothers. All the rest of the prize is yours—treasure and all.—But that man is mine." Then he thundered, "Señor Alvarado, I have sailed a thousand leagues to see your face and to cut your throat. I am Captain Tranquillo!"

At that dreaded and detested name, made infamous and terrible by the sack of San Lorenzo, a cry came out of the Hispaniola, from all of the men who had herded back on the afterdecks, bringing the ship noticeably down by the stern.

Then the single voice of Alvarado floated over the water.

"Sea-murderer, and devil! Trust me to find you if—"

A small brass gun had been dragged back along the top deck, loaded to the muzzle with small shot, and the muzzle depressed as much as possible. Now it roared.

But the buccaneers were too close, and the charge flew harmlessly over their heads.

The periagua, so far untouched in the battle, now swept up beside the canoa, and they struck the stern of the Spaniard at the same time. Through

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the torn bows of the canoa water was pouring. The men rose dripping from the benches, and with knives, machetes, pistols they leaped for the prize.

They swarmed up the after chains, or strove to board her over the quarters. It was hard work. It took wind and nerve together. The stern of the ship rose as high as a house—and what is so hard as climbing, when the cold stone of fear is a weight in the stomach? Nevertheless the buccaneers mounted the Hispaniola like so many running flames.

Kildare, as he climbed the ship, saw at the top of the wall a hedge of steel, white and quivering as fire. Two men above him reached that living hedge and struck at the face of it. One of them went down, with the pike that killed him lodged through his body. The other began to screech like a madman, striking out with his machete as he reached the rail.

Kildare came up beside him. He made room for them both, with the play of his sword, like the flicking of a snake's tongue. Luis stood by him now, with a song in his throat. The brightness of the sun worked on his great shoulders as though from burnished metal. Blood dripped and dripped from the leaf-shaped head of his lance, so that the Spaniards gave back a little, not so much in retreat but more as if each man wanted elbow room to ply his weapons. A swarm of buccaneers instantly occupied all the vacant space.

Now the men in the tops, seeing that friend and enemy were so close together, stopped firing and came running down the rigging to get into the battle. Through the press strode the captain, holding a long, straight sword before him as a priest might hold a cross. He had a very white face and a very black beard. He wore a steel breast-plate with golden chasings over it. But that did not save him, for as he gained the front rank, rallying his men, threatening and cursing them for cowards, Luis's spear head slid through the black beard and the soft of the throat behind it. The captain's sword fell down, and the man himself dropped beside it and beat the deck with his hands while his own blood strangled him.

CHAPTER XIII.

BROTHERS.

THAT was only the start of it. The captain was down, but there were other leaders. There was the navigator of the ship, a hardy Biscayan sailor whose head had been grazed by a musket ball, and who now wore a bloodstained rag of cloth, like a red turban. He gave directions with a bellowing voice, and fought with a half-pike in one hand and a pistol in the other.

But more than the Biscayan, there was the fair-haired Pedro Alvarado. He leaped with the joy of battle. Excitement squeezed his big throat until a barking cry came out of it, shrill as the voice of a terrier. In fact, there was plenty of fight in the Spaniards, but the mere weight of their own numbers clogged their movements, whereas the buccaneers, with a professional coolness, never crowded their first rank men, but fired pistols or muskets past their heads, or stretched out weapons to parry blows. They worked with a trained harmony until the defenders, seeing man after man fall, were caught by a sudden panic that swept them yelling down in the waist of the ship.

Kildare led the eager buccaneers in

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pursuit. He almost got a yard of steel through his body to pay him for his forwardness, for it was young Pedro Alvarado who stood to him, fighting manfully. He had been an unwilling portion of the rout, carried along by it. Now he and the Biscayan rallied the frightened crew by good example.

There was plenty of fight left in the Spaniards. Alvarado's flying yellow hair, as he lunged and hacked, striving to get in at Kildare, was like a battle flag that showed them the way to the front. They came swarming. The broader space in the waist let their numbers count. In two terrible minutes, the buccaneers lost seven men—all dead, since every one who fell had no chance to ask for quarter. Axes, swords, pistols, knives, machetes tore at them; left them shapeless red things to be trodden under foot as the battle continued.

Not even the courage of buccaneers could endure such losses. Kildare, sweating and straining to get at Alvarado, was caught in an ebb-tide and borne with it back to the round-house deck. Only Pierre Chaptal had remained there since the Hispaniola was boarded. He, with unaided hands, had worked on the little brass deck gun, a gun short of body and big of mouth, a frog among cannon. He turned it about until it pointed back into the waist. Then he double-charged it to the very mouth, with two bags of powder and handfuls of small-shot. Now, as the buccaneers reeled bleeding back from the fight, he snapped a pistol at the pile of black Norman powder over the touchhole.

The priming sent a spurt of crimson fire upward; the little cannon coughed so mightily that all the afterworks of the Hispaniola trembled; and death showered in a vast triangle in the waist. A yell that was at once groan and prayer and death cry and screech of living agony went up. But before it ended, Kildare had led the charge, returning back to the fight.

THE voice of that small gun had been like the roar of doom. The Spaniards were stunned by it, even those who were untouched. Against the savage rush of the buccaneers they seemed unable to make resistance. They were for the most part pistoled or stabbed like cattle. In a battle, it often seems that there is but one heart in the mob. The heart of the Spaniards now stood still for a fatal moment; and before it beat again, they were ruined.

Only on the forecastle a little group of warrior souls remained, with the red sword and the long yellow hair of Pedro Alvarado shining in the forefront. They were ruined, and they knew it; therefore they fought like lost souls, and they gave to every blow the strength of a dying effort.

Kildare came in at them with the Indian Luis on one side of him, the bald-headed buccaneer on the other, Chaptal swinging a machete, Dutch Peter wielding an ax and using the back of it to batter out brains. In a trice the Spaniards were down—except Alvarado.

Kildare shouted, "He is mine! Give me room, brothers!"

They gave back to watch; stood there, grinning and sweating, leaning on their weapons. It had been a good fight. Every man had his wound that stung now and would ache hereafter. It had been a very good fight; and so they were willing to stand aside and watch a master hand finish it.

Pedro Alvarado saw that the day was lost—the last day of his life; no

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doubt. But all the red blood rushed through his veins; his eyes glared; his lips parted, shouting:

"St. James!—St. James!"

With that old Spanish war cry he rushed on Kildare, with a sweeping stroke. The heavy sword slithered harmlessly away along Kildare's blade.

But while the steel clashed, the lust for battle failed to rise into Kildare's throat, and he tried to rouse it with words, crying:

"Guard yourself, Spaniard! You are known to me, Alvarado. You are one of those cattle merchants. You buy beeves to-day and a wife to-morrow. Is there blood enough under your skin to wash out the bargain?"

And he came swerving in with the foot of a dancer, in his conjurer's hand that sun-ray of steel. To his rapid eye the big rapier of the Spaniard seemed frozen in place; he avoided it daintily and lunged for the throat; then he stamped on a spot of blood and missed his aim. Still, as he leaped back, he hoped that he had fleshed his sword in a vital place, and shouted:

"A death!"

He saw the next moment that Alvarado's rapier lay on the deck, while down the right arm of the young Spaniard ran a stream of blood.

"KILL!" roared the chorus of the buccaneers.

Alvarado did not flinch, but drew himself up to meet the final stroke. His eyes were as blue as the ocean in a calm; and Kildare stopped his hand.

Luis stepped in with his javelin raised. Blood freckled the Indian from head to foot.

"This is no longer a fighting man, but a fish that sleeps in the sea. I shall spear him for you, master," said Luis.

"Let him be," panted Kildare. "Take him into the cabin, and then look about for your share of the plunder.—Chaptal," he added, to that gray old werewolf, "you won a lost day for us. But half of the men who began it are dead. Take charge of the ship.—Peter," he went on to the Dutchman, "lay the course for Port Royal. That's the only place where we can sell such a cargo and such a ship."

He pointed at the sky.

"You'll need to be a sailor, Peter, before we reach harbor," he warned.

For the thunderheads from the north had climbed almost to the zenith, black as a herd of elephants. Lightning gleamed like red, branching veins in the bellies of the clouds. Gusts from the approaching storm wrinkled the sea to gray and rattled the rigging of the Hispaniola, which, without a man at the helm, had fallen down wind into the trough.

Yet the buccaneers paid no heed to any coming danger. They had set about the plundering of the ship; the counting of the gains. First they stripped the dead, friend and foe alike, and hurled the bodies ruthlessly overboard. Even the prisoners were forced to join in this work, for quarter had been given, after all, to more than half the poor devils who stood about like sheep and let the Hispaniola be conquered. However hot the blood of buccaneers, they could not forget that white slaves brought at Port Royal a better price than black ones.

So they drove the prisoners to the work of clearing the decks, and as the mutilated bodies were hurled over the side, several times wailing cries rose from the dying who were not quite dead. Their wailing voices were lost in the sea.

A heap of plunder was growing in

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the waist of the Hispaniola. Like ants plundering the nest of a conquered tribe, the buccaneers were continually running up from the bowels of the ship with loads of plunder, which began to form a great heap in the waist. Before they descended again, they paused for refreshment. Eight days of wind and sun had dried them to the bone; therefore they had opened the main hatch and trundled up from the hold half a dozen casks of wine that were part of the cargo.

The heads of the casks were knocked in. With the sway of the ship, many gallons of red wine flowed like blood across the white decks, but the plunderers thought nothing of this waste. Some of them used ladles or cups, but others gripped the edges of the casks with their hands and leaned to drink like cattle. Their yelling, their laughing, their singing, the pounding of their feet, was only a subdued chorus to Kildare, as he stood on the high poop. Sometimes the wind blew all the noise of happy riot far away, wasting it across the sea; and even in the lulls that tumult was to him a distant thing of no concern.

As a fishhawk picks a fish from the sea, so he had seized on that gallant young gentleman, Pedro Alvarado.—But what should he do with the prize?

HE went into the great cabin under the roundhouse. It had been a place of luxurious refinement, worthy of that Castilian captain with his white skin and black beard. The beams were fretted with hand carving. There was a bright rug on the floor. But everything else, even to the blankets of the bed, had been swept away, for that pile of loot which had been heaped in the waist of the ship.

Luis was already there, winding a strip of cloth around the wounded shoulder of the tall, fair-haired young Pedro Alvarado. The prisoner was calm as stone, now. His regardless eyes looked at Kildare, but saw him not.

"Later," said Kildare. "Later, Alvarado, we must talk. Now it is time to let the storm blow, while we sleep."

He stretched himself on the bare bed and slept. Alvarado lay down on the rug, pulled a corner of it over him, and slept in turn. The blood of the battle was still wet on them both, and on Luis, who kept watch.

With the flat of its hand, a little later, the storm struck the ship. But Kildare was still sleeping. So was Alvarado. The wind grew until its screaming made Luis's soul tremble. He went out to look at the face of the norther. The sky was as dark as twilight, with the gale. The flat crimson disk of the sun was pasted in the west. The Hispaniola was driving under a rag of head sail hardly bigger than a hand, yet its wrenchings made the ship shudder and the foremast bow.

Three men worked the wheel under the eye of Dutch Peter. They were the only buccaneers who labored. Half a dozen others were on deck, but they merely relayed Dutch Peter's orders, and with pistol in hand forced the Spanish crew to perform every task. A dozen of the latter were aloft, lowering the main top yard, when a great sea kicked the stern of the Hispaniola to the leeward. The whole shoulder of the wind struck the lofty hull and bumped it over. Through the sky the three mastheads swept down toward the sea, and from the dozen Spaniards, clinging to the ropes, a voice like the scream of a sea bird came through the storm. The ship righted herself slowly. All the waist was filled with white

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surges. The forecastle and the stern were tall islands.

She might have broken in two—she might have sunk at this moment. So thought the Spanish sailors, apparently, for they abandoned their work to come to deck. This was seen by the buccaneer who acted as foreman over them. He was that same man with the red, bald head and the two pigtails. Luis could see him laughing as he lifted a pistol, sighting it with care—but still laughing as he fired.

THE foremost sailor of the descending crowd instantly lost his hold. The sway of the mast pitched him sidewise. The wind filled his clothes as tight as sausage skins. He slid sidewise on the gale, in a long, slanting line that disappeared into the sea. His companions mounted up the mast again to resume their work. Then the Hispaniola lifted herself gallantly, flung the lurching seas from her decks, floated once more, birdlike and living.

Luis pulled open the cabin door by dint of force. The scream of the wind entered before him. He shut it out again, but still the ship quivered with the mighty sound. The deck leaped and staggered under his feet.

Alvarado was in a chair, but Kildare still slept. Wonder come upon Luis. He had seen Kildare stepping lightly as a dancer into the fight on the crowded deck, and then he had felt that a divine power turned bullets and steel from the captain's body. Yet the sight of Kildare in battle was not so moving to him as this glimpse of the man sound asleep while the ship labored on the brink of ruin. At this moment, Luis solemnly opened his heart and accepted Kildare as his master.

Through anxious hours the crew waited and watched the plunging of the Hispaniola; when the storm had abated, Kildare awoke. He got up and sat at the table with his sword before him. He was dressed in knee breeches only. As he breathed, his ribs showed like great claws grasping his torso. The blood was dried on his hands, on his arms, on his breast, on his feet. But he sat regardless of this. Luis brought him a bucket of water that remained unused on the deck. Kildare's hollow eyes were fixed upon the future, however, and he scarcely saw the devoted Indian.

Afterwards, half a dozen of the buccaneers came to see their captain; but when they had opened the cabin door, they retired again as though they had blundered into a dark cavern and seen the eyes of the dragon inside it. Not once did Kildare stir from his day dream, though he heard the drunken shouting on deck. His narrow black mustache bristled as his mouth compressed.

The Spaniard, young Alvarado, was perfectly calm and silent also; yet he could not help knowing that his life depended upon Kildare's thoughts. The captor sat there so quietly, with the blood of the battle still upon his hands—still on the sword that lay before him.

At last Kildare stirred. There was ink, a pen, and paper. He scrawled out a message in Spanish.

"Read it, *señor*," said he.

The Spaniard took it up in his left hand and read:

Noble Señor Larreta,

Misfortune has overtaken me. The Hispaniola is gone from me. I am a plucked bird, and I am flying away until I grow new feathers.

The grief in my heart is that I must give up all claim on the hand of the noble lady, Ines Heredia. As for the five

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thousand pieces of silver which were delivered to you from me, in settlement of the marriage, they are cancelled. I have received full payment from the Englishman, Ivor Kildare, and I give him, in turn, all my claims to that happiness.

I sign myself with a thousand regrets, but with ten thousand hopes for your welfare and for the future of the noble lady.

DON PEDRO looked up from the reading of the letter. He saw Kildare's eyes upon him, as bright as a hawk's and as blue as blue steel.

"I must sign this, Señor Kildare?" he said. "You have seen her — and therefore I must sign this?"

Kildare smiled on him faintly.

"You are young, Alvarado," he said. "You are as handsome and fine a gentleman as I have ever seen. And you are young. May ten thousand gallons of good red wine flow down your throat before the day of your death! May a whole herd of noble beeves and flocks of sheep and goats march down your gullet. May you crush orchards of fruit with your teeth, before your end.—But none of these things will be if you fail to sign the letter and seal it with this wax, and with the ring that is on your finger."

Pedro Alvarado began to muse. He sat down. Yellow hair and blue eyes were strange, thought Kildare, in such a Spaniard.

"After all," said Alvarado, "you have seen her. And therefore I know that you will be as good as your word. She is the one jewel. Men who have looked on her cannot desire any other. —And I must die, *señor,* if I do not put my name at the bottom of this letter?"

"There was a curse on my sword," said Kildare, "or I should have spitted you fairly through the heart as we fought. I only ask for the least honorable excuse to kill you now. I am ready for anything except murder, Alvarado. It will not be murder if you fail to ransom your life in this way, and by swearing on the altar of your honor that you will never come near her again."

Alvarado smiled. His eyes were still as calm as a calm sea. He seemed to Kildare the most beautiful and noble of men.

"I shall sign this," said Alvarado, "because I am forced to sign it. But as for the future, nothing can force me to sell my hope of seeing her again."

Kildare raised from the table a pistol, cocked it, and levelled it at the head of the Spaniard.

"I give you time for your last prayers, *señor,*" said he. "Unless they are very long, that is."

Alvarado raised his calm face.

"Our Father in heaven," he said, "forgive me my sins, and grant my eyes living—or in life after death—to see again the lovely face of Ines Heredia." He looked down at Kildare. "That is all, *señor,*" he said. "I am ready."

Kildare hurled the pistol from him.

"Alvarado," he said, "you are the first Spaniard I have ever wished to call brother.—Sit down. Sign the letter.—Seal it with your ring. And I shall set you free as soon as we touch an island. You may find better fortune, and Ines Heredia with it. I shall cut your throat hereafter, wherever we meet. But I drink to you, now, as to a friend."

"Noble and generous Señor Kildare," said the Spaniard, bowing, "I shall drink to you with thirst in my soul. And when I stab you to the heart, on another day, I shall honor the

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blood I spill as though it came from the veins of a gentleman of Castille!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SHORE LEAVE.

TWO days later they made a small island and used the periagua, which had been kept in tow, to land Pedro Alvarado. Alvarado, his hat under his arm, stood up in the stern sheets with his face toward Kildare. He kept alternately bowing and waving and smiling, so that no one could have guessed that there was anything other than the most brotherly devotion between the two.

Then Kildare sailed on toward Port Royal. His mind was not clear. Porto Bello and Ines Heredia were the two chief objectives in his mind, but he could not see his way to them. He had checked and beaten back Pedro Alvarado. He had stopped a little frigate loaded with salt fish and other provisions, but he had let it go free, only charging it with Pedro Alvarado's letter to Porto Bello. That letter might work much good. But in the meantime all the way before Kildare was obscure to the eye of his mind. He only knew that Port Royal and the sale of the Hispaniola was a forced conclusion.

Uncertain winds carried them slowly toward Jamaica. Sometimes, Kildare felt that they could never reach harbor, for the ship was totally without discipline, and far less than half manned. Three men had fallen in the canoa, at the beginning of the battle with Hispaniola; and in the fight to master the Spaniard, exactly twelve more had gone down. That left, of an original thirty-nine, a scant twenty-four, including Kildare and Luis. And this number was still further diminishing.

Every day and every night, there was an orgy. The brandy and the claret ran freely. Many a night Kildare, wrapped in the darkness of his great desire, walked the poop and saw in the waist below the dancers leaping and whirling, while the moon kept their black shadows staggering beside them. It was not all dancing or dicing, either; there were also furious and dangerous brawls. He saw two men who were sworn mates and blood-brothers clasp their left hands together and stab each other in true and delightful buccaneer fashion. Too much brandy killed another free companion as surely as a sword thrust. And another drunkard simply disappeared during one night, either thrown overboard or falling into the sea. That left twenty buccaneers to handle the big ship—with ninety prisoners under the hatches!

Most of the twenty were helpless with liquor, day and night. They could only hold together in one agreement—that they would cut the throat of any one who tried to come between them and their liquor. When Pierre Chaptal fiercely upbraided them and showed them their danger, some of them calmly proposed to turn the prisoners overboard, so that they might go on drinking unperturbed.

THERE were only two on whom Kildare could count, Luis and old Chaptal. And so he split the day into watches which provided that two sober men should always be on deck. To work the ship, to cook for the buccaneers and the poor Spaniards between decks, he had to take on deck a certain number of the prisoners every day; which meant that a ceaseless outlook had to be kept. On the roundhouse, the brass cannon was kept constantly loaded, pointing down into the

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waist. Every day the little gun was freshly charged and primed.

But throughout the voyage the Spaniards never once tried to rise. Whether drunk or sober, the buccaneers appeared to the prisoners as so many unhuman devils who could never be mastered. But a happy man was Kildare when at last the Hispaniola slid into the beautiful harbor of Port Royal, where a score of ships were already anchored, some of them trim merchantmen, some so negligently rigged that it was easy to guess that buccaneer carelessness had had the handling of them.

A fever of delight came over Kildare's crew as they saw the low, white buildings of the town, the green archings of the palm trees, the images of wharves and ships lying deep in the still water.

Small boats put out from shore, pulled by the long arms of the Jamaican Negroes; a crowd of townsmen swarmed out onto the wharves—landsharks waiting for these fat fish from the deep sea.

The Hispaniola slid to moorings; the anchor splashed; the heavy rope cable went out with a rumble and roar. And before the anchor held, already the sharing of the ready loot had begun about the foot of the mainmast.

Kildare, who had found clothing of Quaker quietness, except for the fine lace at the throat and the wrist, stood idly by, letting Pierre Chaptal and Dutch Peter distribute the shares of clothes, of weapons, of the thousand odds and ends of which the ship had been plundered. The division was rapidly made, and was accepted without comment, for the men were only hungry to get ashore and to the spending of their hard cash. There was plenty of this. Of gold and silver, the value of seven thousand pieces of eight were to be split among twenty hands, which made nearly a hundred pounds in English money to every man-jack of them. To Kildare, as the captain, the battle leader and the organizer of this expedition, there went four whole shares.

He stood on an empty cask in the midst of the litter and called out to them:

"Friends, I told you at the taking of the Hispaniola that my plunder would be one man. And I've had that man and loosed him again. The money is yours. So is the value of the cargo and the ship and the slaves, which I'll sell for you at as good a price as I can get. And if you like this treatment, tell the friends you find in the Port Royal taverns that we've had a jolly cruise from Tortuga; that 'Captain Tranquillo' is an honest man, and—better than honest—that he has the luck of the sea. Who knows how soon we may sail again, and some of you drinking good wine on the deck of my ship again?"

THEY looked at him with an utter bewilderment for a moment, seeing a sane man throw away four hundred pounds in cash, together with as fat a share of the value of the ship and cargo. Then they gave him a cheer that set aflutter the throngs of colors with which, like so many gaudy birds, they had decked out the ship at every point. They ran to the charged and shotted guns and touched them off, still yelling and whooping.

They would still be whooping his name and fame when the liquor mastered them in the Jamaican taverns that day; and a little celebrity was what Kildare needed more than hard cash, at this moment. Whatever the game

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that remained for him to play, he could guess that a hand filled with men and their devoted weapons would be far better for him to hold than a wallet heavy with silver.

Some of the shot from those saluting guns skipped perilously near to the small boats which were hurrying their oars toward the Hispaniola. The buccaneers merely yelled with laughter at the sight of the little craft trying to dodge. No harm was done, but that was only by chance.

Old Pierre Chaptal came to Kildare, grinning more like a wolf than ever. He stood very close, his red eyes fixed on the Englishman's face.

"Captain Tranquillo," he said, "this voyage is for me a good fat vineyard in Burgundy. One more voyage like it will buy me the house as well as the ground. Then I shall find a good wench with some red in her cheeks—and in her nose, too. A red nose is a comfortable thing to see in the winter.—I shall have a brood of small buccaneers; and when they grow up, I'll tell them how they may prosper in the world, if they can find a Tranquillo to fight for. Captain, I do not know what your game may be, but I know that I am your man."

"You'll be ship-keeper, Chaptal," said Kildare. "You won't want to sell your vineyard for some bad rum and a pretty girl. Stay on board till I find the right market for the powder and cannons of our cargo."

Then Kildare and Luis went over the side and ashore in a little canoe. Kildare had with him only what gold remained from that which he had taken from Tranquillo, and a few pieces of silver and his sword. He had given up all claim to the profits from the Hispaniola. He was farther than ever from Porto Bello, yet he told himself that he could almost reach to the lady Ines Heredia!

WHEN they reached the wharf a score of hands reached for them, but most of the attention was directed towards Luis the Indian, for the reason that he had dressed himself in wonderful and ridiculous fashion. With high boots, clothes of satin and lace, and a great yellow wig on his head, to the shore crowd Luis appeared like a hero and grandee of the Spanish Main. And as men and women swirled around the Indian, Kildare said at his ear:

"You're free, now, Luis. Free to do as you like and to spend your money. Buy what you please, and drink what you please—except rum. Go off with you—and be gay!"

Like gulls around sea-refuse, beating their wings in crowds and screaming out, so the land-sharks, male and female, clustered around the Indian. Kildare slipped away, and in an instant was detached from all the noisy life of the waterfront. He seemed more like a sober merchant of the town, as he passed up a street, glancing into the taverns, until he was stopped by a voice that balled out a sea-song. And straightway he stepped inside.

The place was like any other tavern—a long room with kegs ranged around it, active little black boys hovering about to take orders, benches and tables, two windows on the street, and before each window a keg cage filled with gaudy parrots. There were several groups of drinkers, each group turning itself into a misty island by throwing up a screen of smoke that ascended to the beams of the low ceiling. A fiddler walked up and down atop a table, scratching off tunes and musical fragments. Sometimes the voices of

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the men rumbled, and sometimes they roared.

Kildare sat down in a corner and made himself obscure over a glass of Bordeaux; he wanted to see and not to be seen. But hardly had he taken his place and received his drink when two figures of men paused in the doorday, blocking away the light. Kildare felt eyes upon him, and he saw that the real Captain Tranquillo was standing at the entrance, clad in a magnificent suit of crimson, with a great flowering of blue ribbons about his knees. There was a difference in his swarthy face now. It was that the scar between his eyes no longer was white, but that it was red. His arms were folded. He stared at Kildare, and over his shoulder appeared the egg-shaped head of the Negro, Pedrillo, looking in the same direction. They seemed to Kildare hardly like real beings, but ghosts that rise by night.

"Hey!—Tranquillo! Captain Tranquillo! Come in!" shouted several voices.

The host of the tavern ran up to the famous man and entreated him to enter, to honor the inn by accepting a bowl of punch without charge. But Tranquillo turned slowly and strode away, the Negro following like a great walking ape.

The moment the man was gone, Kildare shuddered and looked suddenly behind him. He was glad that the wall had been so close to his chair!

CHAPTER XV.

FOOL'S GRAVE.

"I'LL see you damned, Captain Henry Morgan!" shouted a voice, as a figure arose from the mist of tobacco smoke that billowed around the table across the room. It was a one-armed man with a dirty bandage tied around his head. Although his right arm was gone, he wore his machete on his left hip. He had on a great leather belt with a pair of pistols and a knife stuck into the front of it.

A great, roaring voice answered, "When they cut off your arm, they cut off half your wits. You can damn when you please, and where you please, but if you stay at my table I'll cut off the other arm myself and hold it by the hand while the dogs eat it. Get out of my sight!"

The one-armed man merely laughed.

"You think I'll fight you, Morgan, but I won't," said he. "I've still got a half-hour of life, and that shall be spent in drinking. — Farewell! May you rot of a plague and burn of a fever! I hope that my part of hell will be free of you."

The speaker turned away.

Captain Henry Morgan drew out a pistol and looked as though he seemed to be about to shoot the man through the back. Then he changed his mind, slowly and regretfully putting up the gun. He was a man with the brow of a bull, and two sharply incised wrinkles that showed the resolution of a bull. The lower part of his face was graced by a tuft of beard between the lower lip and the chin, and a pair of mustaches which sprouted from meager roots but flowered into luxurious curling masses that were combed straight out. They looked as though they had been pasted on the skin and would fall off the instant the paste grew dry and old. Every mark of brutality was in his mouth and jaw, but the face was lighted by a brain that shone out of the eyes. If he had been mere brute, he would have been a man to fear; but since he had an in-

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ventive mind as well, his brutality was all the more to be dreaded.

Now he relaxed in his chair. On its back was perched a big monkey with a greenish face and a white beard. A quantity of nuts lay on the table, ready to season the wine of the buccaneer, and one of these, from time to time, he threw over his shoulder to the ape. The animal caught them out of the air, cracked and ate them, curling the tip of its tail with pleasure. When it was not eating, it continually stroked the captain's head, permitting its foolish eyes to wander around the room.

CAPTAIN HENRY MORGAN now struck the table with his fist and again jumped to his feet. At once the monkey leaped onto his shoulder. For a moment it looked as if Morgan would pursue his quarrel with the wounded man; but instead, he made straight out through the door.

The host tried to stop him, babbling something about the score. Morgan struck him aside and went on, with his companions laughing and shouting behind him.

The one-armed man was unsteady, as if from liquor. He stood wavering before Kildare's table, watching Morgan leave. He was young. The lines of debauchery were worked deeply around his eyes. A white spot rode in either cheek. He was either sick with alcohol or with some other poison.

"Sit down," said Kildare.

The man took a chair and sprawled back in it.

"Wine be damned!" he exclaimed in answer to Kildare's invitation. "There's lemons and sugar and hot water and rum. I'll make a punch that's fit for a man's drinking. Bring me everything, boy! Hurry!—The devil is glad of every minute that I lose."

The boy scampered off.

"That Henry Morgan," said Kildare. "I should have heard of him by his look. But he's new to me."

"He'll not be new for long, then," said the other. "To you or to all the world—unless the smoke of his own fire chokes him. He's done enough already, but now he's only beginning. Why, he's the one who took a periagua with a few friends to help him, and caught eight merchants in a week, bringing all the fat ships back with him. That was how he showed us his quality.

"And that was but the start of him. He went with fifteen ships and five hundred men to Santa Katalina, with Mansvelt. They took the south island, and then they took the north island. After Mansvelt died, Morgan took Puerto Principe, just a bit of a time ago. And that is why so many buccaneers are about Port Royal now, as lean as starved cats. For there was only twelve thousand pounds in money and goods to split among seven hundred men.

"The French have fallen off from Morgan, too. Yet he's not done. He'll win through to a great name for himself, one day.—All the same, there's no blood in his soul. It's all in his body. And I've told him that. But there's blood in me, my friend—body and soul, and soul and body. Though most of it has run away."

HE began to laugh at this final, strange remark of his. And as he mixed punch with the materials which the boy had brought, Kildare said:

"You have the fever, friend?"

"I have the fever," agreed the buccaneer. "I have the last fever of all, at that. The last of my life, and the

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last of my money, and the last bowl of punch that ever I'll drink.—Here, boy!"

He threw some silver at the servant, and then, pouring for Kildare and himself, he raised his tankard.

"I left my right arm in a street of Puerto el Principe. The doctors promise me life, if I'll stay in bed on my back. But what's a left-handed life to a man that *is* a man? So I'll finish it all.—Stand up with me, friend. Stand up and drink.—To the bottom!"

He staggered as he rose. Kildare, having tasted the punch, which was really excellent, put down his portion; and standing by, he saw his companion still staggering, still drinking, with driblets of the liquor spilling from the corners of his mouth onto his breast.

Finishing, the buccaneer dashed the tankard to the ground, where it burst in pieces, with a loud crash.

"Now, lad," said the pirate to Kildare. "Since you've drunk with me and sat with me, come to hell with me!"

He snatched a pistol from his belt and pointed it at Kildare, snapping the big hammer down. Kildare's swift hand barely reached the gunbarrel in time to beat it down, so that the ball was fired into the floor.

The buccaneer hardly seemed to be aware that his shot had missed; but dropping the first pistol, he pulled out a second one, clapped it to his own forehead, and sent a bullet through his brain. He fell over the back of a chair and hung there limply, the blood running down onto the floor in a soft patter.

The host came up, suddenly, to Kildare.

"These things spoil my business," he said, gloomily. "Sit down again, my noble friend. I'll brew you a better bowl of punch, and you shall have a clean table.—Here, Pedrillo!—Here, you black-faced, lazy dogs! Pull this dead fool out of the way and wipe up the floor. If there's much more blood spilled on it, it will smell more like a slaughter house than a respectable tavern!"

At that point a crowd came up the street, roaring as loudly as a storm-wind, and the host rushed out to drum up trade. But he failed. Kildare saw half a dozen of his own buccaneers go past the door, each man surrounded by a coterie of women or spongers.

THERE entered the doorway, now, a man with a sweeping, long black coat and a clerical collar. He shaded his eyes with his hand while he examined the dimness of the tavern, turning here and there a nose as long and as sharp as a pointer's.

When he saw Kildare he stepped to the table and took off his hat, making Kildare such a bow as one would never expect to see in such a place as Port Royal.

"Are you that famous man of the sea, Captain Tranquillo?" asked the stranger. "Is it you who have just brought the Hispaniola into port, loaded with guns and the finest powder?"

"I am just off the Hispaniola," said Kildare. "As for that cargo, perhaps you are a merchant, as well as a minister?"

"Burning or unburnt," said the other, "gunpowder is of very little interest to me. But I have been sent to you expressly by a man who knows all about the stuff. That is Captain Henry Morgan, about whom people talk so much in these days. And he begs you to come to his house. He has just learned a short while ago he was sit-

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ting here with a great sailor, unknown to him; and he sends me to say that at this moment he is brewing a bowl of punch in your honor. He wishes to talk with you, Captain Tranquillo, about matters of great importance. Shall I show you the way to his residence?"

Kildare had stood up to greet the stranger. Henry Morgan was the very man for Kildare's rapidly forming purposes. Therefore he said:

"I'll go with you at once."

And throwing down money to pay his bill, he stepped out into the street.

A GUST of wind came toward them, in it a whirl of dust that staggered like a drunken ghost. They put down their heads to the blast. It was hot as the breath of a fire, but the man of the long nose strode forward, hooking a skeleton arm into that of Kildare. As he went on, he was saying:

"I've seen the jolly buccaneers from your ship, Captain Tranquillo. Gold and silver are good, tough metals, but those fellows know how to burn them up like dry tinder. You, however, are a gentleman of another stripe. Liquor is not friend, but a curse to the devising mind. It furls the sails of great conceptions, and anchors the ship of progress. But you, noble captain, keep your wits at work, and a man's wits are the only servants who will labor for him without a fee.

"Those other poor rascals will be dead drunk before the end of the day and the filthy buzzards, the carrion-feeders of the town, will devour them to the very bone. But to him that hath shall be given, Captain Tranquillo; and having had San Lorenzo and its treasures, you will have many another town of the Spanish Main before you die—else I have never known an eye to see a scheme, a hand to execute it."

This half moral, half flattering sententiousness continued to pour from the lips of Kildare's guide until they came to a better part of the town, where the houses were larger. At the huge, blank street wall of one of these they stopped, and the man of religion knocked three times, sharply, and again a fourth time. A bolt was drawn; the door clanked open. A Negro whose face looked like a bulldog's head cast in black rubber drew back, scowling as they entered a long, dark hallway. As they stepped on, the door closed with a heavy slam, so that it continued to vibrate for a moment against the bolt that had been thrown back in place.

Doors opened from the hall to either side; but the guide, still talking, went straight on to the end of the passage, where he pulled open another door as massive as that which led onto the street. The hallway had been dim enough, but now all that Kildare could see was a chamber more shadowy than twilight. His guide stood back to let him enter first, saying:

"Pass on, Captain Tranquillo. I am sorry that there is not more light for you to see your way. Still—" he went on, as Kildare moved across the threshold—"there is light enough for a fool to see his grave!"

Kildare whirled as though a hand had jerked him around, but the door crashed shut in his face, and its iron bolts went clanging home into their sockets. The voice of the ministerial guide was raised on the farther side of the door into a croaking laughter.

"And so, *adieu*, fox! The teeth of the wolf are in you. You will soon be down his throat!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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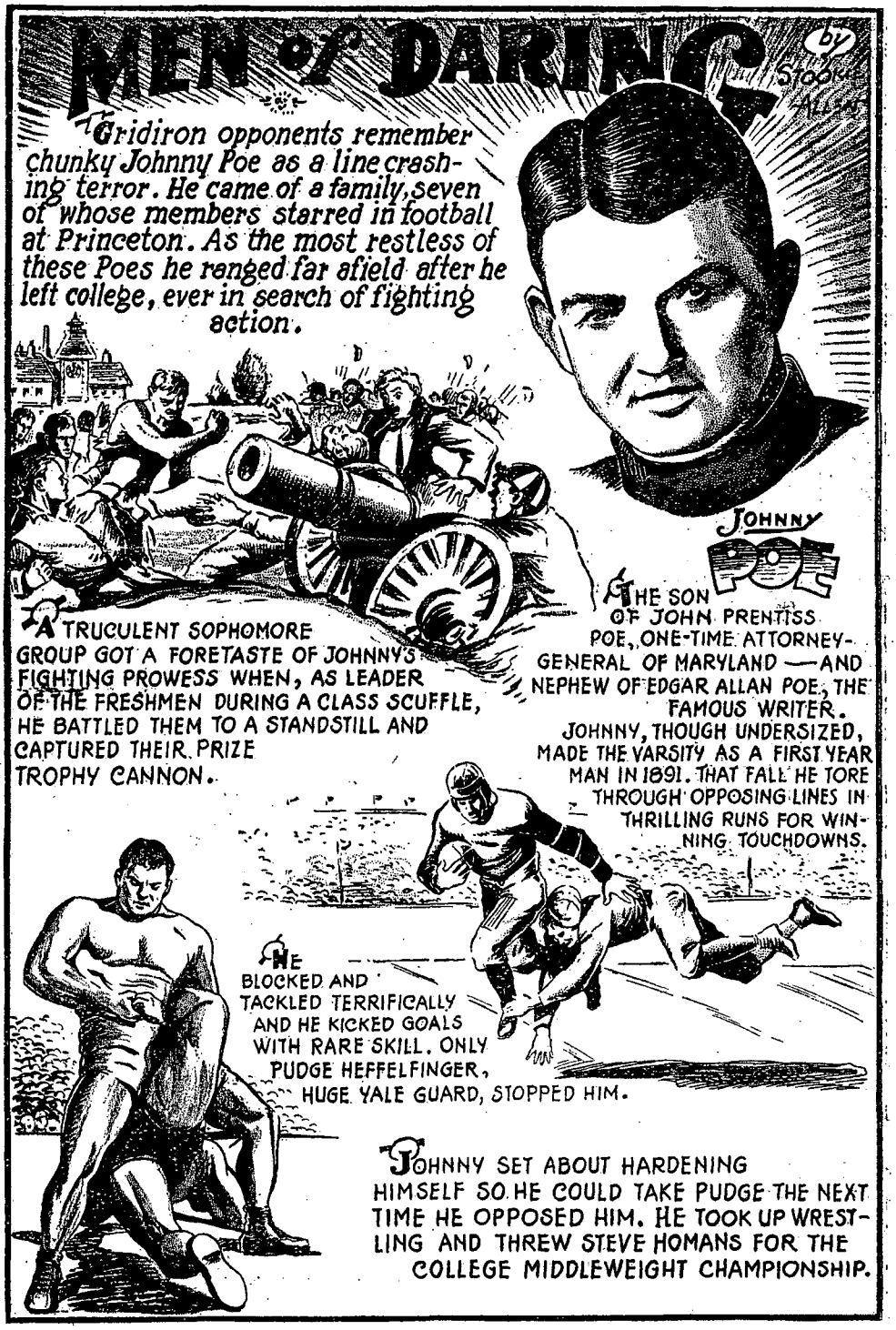
MEN of DARING
by Stoddard Allen
Gridiron opponents remember chunky Johnny Poe as a line crashing terror. He came of a family, seven of whose members starred in football at Princeton. As the most restless of these Poes he ranged far afield after he left college, ever in search of fighting action.
JOHNNY POE
A TRUCULENT SOPHOMORE GROUP GOT A FORETASTE OF JOHNNY'S FIGHTING PROWESS WHEN, AS LEADER OF THE FRESHMEN DURING A CLASS SCUFFLE, HE BATTLED THEM TO A STANDSTILL AND CAPTURED THEIR PRIZE TROPHY CANNON.
THE SON OF JOHN PRENTISS POE, ONE-TIME ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF MARYLAND —AND NEPHEW OF EDGAR ALLAN POE, THE FAMOUS WRITER. JOHNNY, THOUGH UNDERSIZED, MADE THE VARSITY AS A FIRST YEAR MAN IN 1891. THAT FALL HE TORE THROUGH OPPOSING LINES IN THRILLING RUNS FOR WINNING TOUCHDOWNS.
HE BLOCKED AND TACKLED TERRIFICALLY AND HE KICKED GOALS WITH RARE SKILL. ONLY PUDGE HEFFELFINGER, HUGE YALE GUARD, STOPPED HIM.
JOHNNY SET ABOUT HARDENING HIMSELF SO HE COULD TAKE PUDGE THE NEXT TIME HE OPPOSED HIM. HE TOOK UP WRESTLING AND THREW STEVE HOMANS FOR THE COLLEGE MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP.

Next Week: Charles Courtney, Legal Safe-breaker

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JOHNNY EVENED HIS SCORE WITH PUDGE THE FOLLOWING AUTUMN. HEFFELFINGER, PLAYING GUARD ON THE CHICAGO A.C.'S ALL-AMERICANS, WAS SET TO STOP HIM IN HIS TRACKS BUT POE MADE HIM LOOK FOOLISH AS HE TWISTED AND SQUIRMED CLEAR TO A 50 YD. GALLOP FOR A TOUCHDOWN. HE REPEATED WITH ANOTHER LIKE IT AND KICKED TWO GOALS— THE ONLY SCORES IN THE GAME.
FLUNKING HIS EXAMS JOHNNY LEFT COLLEGE TO ENGAGE IN MINING AFTER TURNS AT COW-PUNCHING AND TIMBERING IN NEVADA. OUT IN DEATH VALLEY HE BECAME A HERO OVERNIGHT WHEN HE BEAT UP A BIG FOREIGNER WHO HAD DISPARAGED THE STARS AND STRIPES.
HE ENLISTED FOR THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR AND FOR THE FILIPINO INSURRECTION. TO HIS CHAGRIN HE FAILED TO SEE ACTION. BUT LATER AS A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE HE GOT PLENTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA. IN A HONDURAS-NICARAGUA WAR IN 1907, POE HAD CHARGE OF A GUN IN THE DEFENSE OF AMALPA. WHEN A GUNBOAT APPEARED OFF THE FORT, POE DREW ITS FIRE THEN RAKED IT WITH SHOT TO DRIVE IT OFF, STOPPING FURTHER ATTACKS BY SEA.
IN THE WORLD WAR POE JOINED THE BRITISH ARTILLERY. BUT WHEN IT APPEARED HE WOULD MISS BATTLING AT CLOSE QUARTERS HE TRANSFERRED TO THE FAMOUS KILTED "BLACK WATCH", DUBBED BY THE GERMANS "THE LADIES FROM HELL". JOHNNY AT LENGTH GOT THE RED-BLOODED ACTION HE CRAVED. THEN ONE DAY IN 1915 IN AN ATTACK NEAR LOOS, BELGIUM, HE WENT OUT AHEAD OF HIS CHARGING COMRADES TO HAND OUT TRENCH BOMBS. HALF WAY ACROSS NO-MAN'S-LAND A BULLET HIT HIM IN THE STOMACH. "NEVER MIND ME," HE CRIED AS SOME RUSHED TO HIS AID, "GO AHEAD WITH THE BOMBS!" IT WAS HIS FINAL FIGHT IN A WAR THAT PROMISED HIM ENOUGH ACTION AT LAST.

Also, Women of Daring: Mrs. James L. Clark, Huntress

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ASTROLOGY
3000 YEARS AGO —and NOW!

Miss Marguerite Carter has devoted a number of years to the study of the ancient and modern art of astrology. She claims no power personally to foretell the future or solve your present problems. Her horoscopes are brought to you by ARGOSY as interesting, entertaining information about Astrology.

A great and lasting tribute to Astrology is the magnificent mural decoration on the ceiling of the Grand Central Terminal station in New York. Thousands of years ago this same zodiac was incised on the walls of temples in the great cities of Egypt, India, Assyria, Phœnicia, and Babylonia, proving how ageless Astrology really is.

Every Reading Absolutely Individual

Your life by the stars as revealed by Astrology will be charted for you in a 1,500 word reading! You will receive a complete sun reading by return mail when you send the coupon. In addition, the eight planetary positions at your birth as given by ancient text books will be explained. There is nothing to solve, nothing to write but your name and birth-date. No two readings are alike unless people are of the same sex, born on the same day, in the same year!

MAIL THIS COUPON ARG 2-24

Marguerite Carter, ARGOSY Astrologist,
280 Broadway, New York.

Please mail the sun forecast and key to planetary positions for the birthdate below. I enclose 10c in coin for mailing and handling.

BIRTHDATE ..... (YEAR) (MONTH) (DATE)

NAME ..... SEX .....

STREET ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

Your Life by the Stars

ARGOSY offers you a complete horoscope, including your personal sun forecast and eight separate planetary readings as cast by Marguerite Carter, eminent astrologist. No obligation—only enclose ten cents in coin to cover cost of mailing and handling.

MAIL THIS COUPON

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Your Horoscope

Those who have received horoscope readings from Miss Carter will find the first sections explained below. Readings including all of your own planetary positions will appear weekly in the next few issues of ARGOSY.

Section 202. Moon.

ASTROLOGERS consider that this planetary position is one which imparts a tendency toward obstinacy and a great deal of tenacity. As a result of having come into the world at a time when it was operating strongly, you are inclined to be extremely obstinate when directly opposed. That quality is greatly augmented when you are opposed in any manner suggestive of an attempt to dominate or force your compliance. The influence of this vibration would have made you less forgiving and disinclined to overlook a slight or injury. It would have made you more kind-hearted, however, unless you are prejudiced. It is considered an excellent position for the achievement of ambition as it imparts singleness of purpose and the ability to concentrate on one objective to the exclusion of everything else. Its influence made you much more steady, purposeful and relentless than would have been the case had it not been operating when you came into the world. The probabilities are that your senses of taste and touch are more highly developed and of more importance to you than the other three.

Section 289. Neptune.

PEOPLE who were born under this planetary vibration are much more likely to be psychic than would have been the case had this influence not existed at the time of their birth. The position does not have great effect upon the average man, but is more than likely to add force to the man who is out of the ordinary. As a result of having been born under this influence you are more receptive to psychic influences, but if your interests are wholly material it is not likely to have a noticeable effect upon your life. The influence of the planet is of a spiritual and occult nature, according to astrology, and would make you much more capable of understanding things of an occult nature than you would have been—if your spiritual qualities are developed it will lend great force to your contacts with people in general.

Section 242. Mars.

ASTROLOGERS consider that this is a planetary position which bears testimony to the fact that the individual affected will, during early life, experience some obstacles to the realization of ambition. It is considered a good position for the general health, increasing resistance to disease and imparting splendid vitality. It is a vibration which makes one a good worker, but it usually lessens any desire the individual might otherwise have, to go into a personally controlled business. Unless other planetary positions in your chart are of an opposite nature, you are more likely to work under supervision than entirely on your own responsibility. It is not a planetary vibration which imparts great warmth and passion. The probabilities are that you are not highly emotional. On the other hand, it is very likely that you have a strong will and as a result are not often led astray by the emotional side of your nature. Astrologers have always considered that this is a strong testimony pointing to the fact that later years of life will be quite peaceful and contented.

Section 290. Uranus.

THE planetary influence considered here is one which would have made you much more honest, downright and constructive than you would have been had you not come into the world at a time when it was in operation. It is a position which is considered very fortunate in many respects. The sign in which the planet considered in this section was, is one which has always been associated by astrologers with steady, persistent, constructive effort. It is a sign which produces practical builders and those who are able to carry out the plans of others with great faithfulness. That does not mean that you are wholly practical as other planetary positions in your chart must be considered. However, as a result of this influence you are much more steady, patient and determined than would have been the case without it. A number of empire builders and outstanding men and women in other walks of life were born within the scope of this influence. Among them were Napoleon, Cecil Rhodes and Wilhelm II. Dante was also born under this planetary vibration.

Section 245. Mars.

HAVING been born at a time when this planetary influence was operating strongly, you are much more frank, outspoken and honest than you would have been without its effect. The position is one which imparts very positive qualities. The sign and planet are in accord to a considerable degree, yet the planet is considered to be one which imparts impulsiveness in speech and action, sometimes to an excessive degree. The sign being also of the same nature, you are much more impulsive, impatient of restraint and hasty than you would have been without its influence. If these tendencies are in evidence they should be restrained by all means, because the strength of this vibration is such as to cause them to grow into proportions which might readily lead you into difficulties. It is not at all unlikely that this influence would bring about a great deal of travel at some time during your life and quite possibly adventure. Astrologers have considered for centuries that it is a strong testimony pointing in that direction. It is considered to be an indication of unusual experience during later years.

Section 204. Moon.

THE Moon is very strong in the sign with which this section deals. Very few people who were born at a time when this vibration was in force are inclined to wander far from their own firesides. Certainly it takes powerful influences of an opposite nature to overcome the testimony of this position. You are undoubtedly very fond of home ties. The influence is one which fits individuals affected, particularly for parenthood. The sign this section considers is the strongest one in the zodiac, in that respect. As a result of this vibration you are much more economic, sensitive and psychic than you would have been had it not been operating when you came into the world. Astrologers consider that it has some tendency to increase any inclination toward jealousy. Your success will undoubtedly come about as a result of caution and economy unless there are very strong opposing vibrations shown in your chart. This position would certainly have increased those qualities.

Section 291. Uranus.

ASTROLOGERS have always considered that the planetary position which this section considers is one which has a tendency to lessen the driving force of the will. When one was born under a strong, aggressive birth sign and at a time when other planetary positions were also aggressive in their influence, the effect is not apparent. You are possessed of ample power of will to enable you to overcome obstacles which you encounter, yet the influence of this planetary position would have lessened your selfishness in the carrying out of material, personal plans. Those born under this influence, unless very highly developed spiritually, are usually less forceful although they usually do not realize why they hesitate to impose their will on others. Those born under this vibration who are highly developed spiritually have the power to become great religious leaders. As a result of having come into the world under this planetary influence you are much more likely to "turn the other cheek" than you would have been without it.

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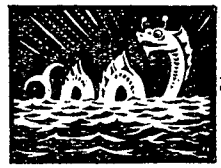
STRANGER *than* FICTION



By JOHN S. STUART

COMING OR GOING

FLYING an airplane from west to east is less difficult than flying from east to west. This is due to the rotation of the earth around its axis. At high altitudes, the spinning of the earth gives aviators who are flying eastward a tail-wind.

DEPUTY SHERIFF DOG

NEMAHA COUNTY, Nebraska, once had a dog for a deputy sheriff. He attended all trials at the courthouse, and once captured a jail breaker. Perhaps he is a cousin of Mickey Finn, the fifteen-year-old Irish terrier who recently received a medal because he routed some robbers in his master's store in Queens, Long Island, and had the foresight to grab a piece of cloth from the seat of the burglar's trousers for evidence!

UNEASY LIES THE HEAD

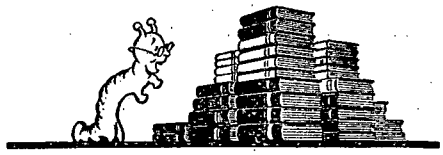
A KING in Afghanistan seldom lives to die in bed. King Amanullah was one of the few who escaped from the country with his life. His father was assassinated in 1919; his successor, Bacho Sakao (The Waterboy) was executed; and now his uncle, Nadir Khan, who captured the throne, has just been assassinated. Nadir Khan began his career as a stable boy; then he became a general; and from 1924 to 1928 was Minister to France. He impressed his rebel tribesmen with his power when he disposed of Ahmad Shah by having him blown from the mouth of a cannon!

STRANGE BED-FELLOWS

THE first U. S. hotel recognized as first class was the Tremont House in Boston, Massachusetts. It was opened in October, 1829, contained one hundred and seventy rooms, and the rate was two dollars a day, which price included four meals. Exclusive occupancy of a room was unknown, and a guest invariably awakened in the morning to find a stranger beside him. Sometimes three or four people slept in one bed, "spoon" fashion. Women were sometimes "roomed" with men. But the rooms had keys, a wash bowl, free cake of soap, gas lights, and running water in the eight "bathing rooms" which were located in the basement!

AFRICAN RAIN BARRELS

SOUTH AFRICAN bushmen who live in areas where long drouths are common, make a practice of blowing out ostrich eggs and filling them with water during the rainy season. The water-filled shells are then buried, to be tapped during the dry days to come.



FOOD FOR BOOKWORMS

THE Public Library in Leningrad contains the greatest number of volumes of any library in the world. There are about 4,832,948 books and 331,100 pamphlets. The Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris contains about 4,000,000 printed books, and 20,000 books in Chinese. The New York Public Library contains 3,182,335 books.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY pays $1 for each letter printed. Send your letter to "Argonotes" Editor, ARGOSY, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

416 ARGOSY BOOKS

WE have located six more ARGOSY serials which were later published in book form, to add to the 410 listed in the Dec. 30 issue. (Those marked with an asterisk are still available, in a 75c edition.)

J. Allan Dunn.....*The Isle of Drums
" .....*Fortune Unawares
William MacLeod Raine ..... Steve Yeager
" ..... Moran Beats Back
W. C. Tuttle..... Bluffer's Luck

(ALL-STORY)

William MacLeod Raine .....*A Daughter of the Dons

OIL maps are made exactly as described in "The Last Place":

Many of the large oil companies actually locate oil structures by exploding dynamite, picking up the earth tremors perhaps miles away on seismographs (the instruments used in recording earthquakes), and then interpreting the readings. And sometimes those maps do cost scores and scores of thousands of dollars, and result in oil developments worth millions. The Gulf Coast has been one grand shooting ground for seismograph crews for years. It's the big home of salt domes.

And those salt domes, too, are peculiar anymules. Tremendous, buried mountains of salt, shoved up into the rocks from Lord knows how deep and heaven knows how or why. Quite frequently they have oil on top or around the sides, sometimes both. Yes, two of 'em would be worth battling over! FOSTER-HARRIS.

A TERRIBLE struggle:

Ossining, N. Y.

I am writing this letter with only one complaint in mind. I think the R. V. Gery stories are terrible! After struggling through "The Pavilion of Mahmud," I just have to register my complete abhorrence of this writer.

Fred MacIsaac's character *Bill Peepe* is always interesting; Hulbert Footner's *Mme. Storey* novelettes are O. K.; H. Bedford-Jones' stories of *John Solomon* are never dry; and Theodore Roscoe is your best author for consistently excellent novels. His latest, "Last Minute," was a masterpiece.

I do not understand why you publish W. Wirt's *Jimmie Cordie* yarns as almost all your readers in "Argonotes" pan them. The Western and futuristic writers are all excellent.

Hoping the ARGOSY sails forever and Gery falls overboard, ARTHUR FURGISON, JR.

A QUESTION:

Hollis, L. I.

In "60° Above and Below," by J. Allan Dunn, a Catholic priest is described as going to say Mass at "twilight."

How long have Catholic priests been allowed to say Mass at twilight?

MARGARET F. PARRINGTON.

AND its answer:

Readers are, no doubt, accustomed to the conventional ritual of cathedral or basilica, or at least that of an established community.

Catholic priests in such *"partibus infidelium"* as 60° Above are missionaries. Missionary priests all over the world are given dispensation which permits them considerable latitude. A missionary priest is apt to have a parish of staggering size, over which his flock is scattered in the small Indian villages and Eskimo igloos which they never leave in winter. Only to the Mission Church by the Mounted Post—or Fort—does anything like a regular congregation come. The priest covers hundreds, thousands of miles, to give his converts Communion, in the Mass. On snowshoes, by dogsled, through storms, with the weather sixty below, he struggles on. He may give four Masses in a day, he may give a dozen; he may journey forty-eight hours to give one.

There can be no set ritual. The important thing is to give the Mass. Only at the Mission Church is the office of Vespers given. The farflung converts never hear it. It also should be remembered that the original hour for Vespers was six.

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Most important of all; twilight comes early in the latitudes above sixty north. There are many days and weeks that are *perpetual* twilight.

I am quite sure that if this question is put to a priest, especially a Jesuit of higher rank, that he will assure them that I am correct, as above. J. ALLAN DUNN.

"BURY them!"

Moundsville, W. Va.

I have a few more Irish snowballs, compliments, and suggestions to waft your way. I see that you promise us seven new writers this coming year. William MacLeod Raine's "King of the Bush" sounds good. Raine has written some (not all of them) good stories and he should be able to write something good about Australia; I am glad it is not another Western because you publish so many punk ones that even a good one is sour.

Next is J. D. Newsom. He also has written some good stories, but as with the Westerns you have overdone it in the past. He is not going to add much to the ARGOSY unless you drop some of the others that have been sending you their whole bum lot.

You say George Challis is a name probably new to ARGOSY readers, but I am one at least who has heard of him, having read his "Splendid Rascal" in 1926. I have not read anything by him since, but if he writes anything else as good as it I will say that you have made a good start for a better ARGOSY.

So much for the new ones. Now, you head your promises for 1934 with "Happy New Year," and after giving a list of the new writers for the past year (we would have been just as well off without Baxter, Bower, Haycox and Coburn) you say there will be more newcomers, but more important than these are more about *John Solomon, Peter the Brazen, Gillian Hazeltine, Bill* and *Jim, Singapore Sammy, Bellow Bill Williams, Jimmie Cordie, Hashknife* and *Sleepy, Bill Peepe, Roadrunner* and *Mme. Storey*. And you call that a happy new year? For Heaven's sake, get next to yourself, and bury them all. You are ruining one of the oldest magazines in America with them.

What I would suggest is to enlarge "Looking Ahead" to describe all of the shorts and novelettes instead of just two or three. Take the "Argonotes" sub-title, "The Readers' Viewpoint," and make a department of it by itself for letters from readers. As far as I am concerned (and again I believe I speak for a large number of readers) you won't have to add any pages to the magazine. Just eliminate the "Men of Daring" and "Stranger Than Fiction" and give these three pages to the departments that I suggest. ANDERSON CLARK.

Looking Ahead!

Pink-Eye

Mme. Storey, beautiful and brilliant woman investigator, is employed to probe an "accident" that may be murder—and one suspect is her employer! A novelette.

By Hulbert Footner

Jib-Boom Charlie

A South Seas beach comber turns pirate and runs afoul of Bellow Bill. A novelette.

By Ralph R. Perry

Women of Daring

Some heroic women to add to our adventurers' Hall of Fame. True stories in pictures.

By Stookie Allen

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—MARCH 3

6 A—24

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WANTED — MEN FOR TEA and COFFEE ROUTES

make up to $45.00 a week

NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED—I GIVE YOU WHAT LITTLE TRAINING NECESSARY— NO RED TAPE—PAY STARTS AT ONCE

Read This Article Carefully

Hundreds of deserving men should read this announcement. Many who have been beset with financial distress will find prompt and permanent relief from their money worries.

FOR YEAR 'ROUND INCOME

Think how wonderful it is to have a nice weekly income just from calling upon and supplying people with daily necessities. Plenty of money to pay your nagging bills—buy clothing—pay off the mortgage—buy yourself a home—put money in the bank—or anything else your heart desires.

TEA AND COFFEE ROUTES PAY BEST

Everybody knows there is nothing like a good weekly route for a fine, steady income. Our routes pay far better than most because we supply the things people must use in order to live. You simply take care of customers' orders on the route in your locality. Established route belongs to you. You collect all the cash we take in and keep a big share of it just for delivering the goods and taking care of the business. I'll furnish you with hundreds of fine premiums to give away with tea and coffee and other fine food products. Hundreds waiting to be served in many localities. Pay begins at once where you call on trade already established.

YOUR OWN FOOD PRODUCTS AT WHOLESALE PRICES

When I send you instructions for making money on my new neighborhood Tea and Coffee Route plan I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries, about half the regular retail prices. This is in addition to your regular pay, so you make big money in cash and save big money on the things you use in your own home.

GO TO WORK AT ONCE

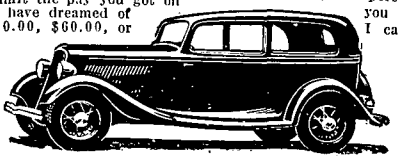
My plan provides immediate cash earnings for those who need money. I want to give employment to a lot more people at once. You start work right in your own locality right near where you live. There is nothing hard or difficult about this job. There's no red tape connected with it. You don't have a lot of expensive equipment to buy.

EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL UNNECESSARY

I spent years of time and a fortune in money perfecting business plans that I give you the very first day you start. Part of your job will be to distribute some advertising matter and sample packages. You will deliver all the goods, collect the money, and keep a big share of it as your pay. This provides you with immediate cash to relieve urgent money worries.

NO LIMIT TO MY OFFER

You have probably never worked for a boss who didn't want to limit the pay you got on Saturday night. You have dreamed of a chance to make $50.00, $60.00, or even $75.00 in a week. That's just the kind of unlimited offer I am making. If you are honest, conscientious, and willing to listen to reason I won't put any limit on your earnings. I'll explain all this to you just as soon as you send me your name.



FORD CAR FURNISHED FREE AS AN EXTRA BONUS NEW FORD TUDOR SEDAN— NOT A CONTEST OR A PRIZE.

DON'T SEND MONEY —JUST YOUR NAME

Don't confuse this with anything you have ever read before—I don't need your money—I need your help. Send me your name so I can lay the facts before you. Then you can decide if the pay is satisfactory. I furnish everything, including a new Ford Sedan to producers. Don't expect me to wait indefinitely to hear from you. If you act promptly it will be a strong thing in your favor with me. Send coupon or penny postcard today.—**Everything is Free.**

FACTORY FRESH FOODS

My tea and coffee and other food products are factory fresh, tested and approved by the American Testing Institute, the very highest known quality at popular prices. It's no wonder people insist on having my brand in preference to any other. I tell you all about this in the free booklet I send you.

I'M NOT AFTER YOUR MONEY

Don't send me a cent—I don't want your money—I need your help. First I want an opportunity to tell you the truth about how to make up to $45.00 a week in pleasant, congenial work. I'll lay all the facts before you, and you'll be the judge if the pay is satisfactory. I'll take all the chances—I don't want you to take any. You may be just the man I'm seeking. I am not going to ask you a lot of embarrassing questions or pry into your personal affairs when you join me. You and I can get together on this business deal without all that. If you have a part-time job, this is your chance for permanent work with no danger of being fired. You don't even need to devote all of your time to this work and you are through punching a time-clock once you start with me in dead earnest.

THINGS TO DO

1. *Mail Coupon*
2. *Read Facts*
3. *Start to work for me*

TEA and COFFEE ROUTE COUPON

ALBERT MILLS, Route Mgr.

4923 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me full particulars of "Home Owned" Tea and Coffee Route plan and just how I can get started on a basis of up to $45.00 a week at once. This is without obligation to me.

NRA MEMBER U.S. WE DO OUR PART

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

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"Top Off" Your meals with TUMS!

The Delicious New Antacid Mint:

THOUSANDS of people everywhere are telling how they have ended the torture of "Fussy Stomach." People who used to have to pick and choose, and actually avoid the very foods they liked best, now simply let their taste guide them in the foods they eat. No longer do they fear the distress of acid indigestion, sour stomach, heartburn, or that nauseating, gassy fullness. The secret—a new candy-like antacid mint called Tums.

Almost everyone, about 7 out of every 10 Americans, suffers some of the effects of acid indigestion. Simply munch 3 or 4 Tums after meals—or when smoking or excesses of eating or drinking cause trouble. You will be surprised how quickly the excess acid is neutralized and the "Fussy Stomach" relieved.

"*Top off*" your meals with Tums—discover the pleasure of eating your favorite foods without the fear of bad after-effects.

If you have trouble sleeping, eat 2 or 3 Tums after your evening meal or before going to bed. See how much better you sleep when Tums have counteracted the acid and gas that torture your nerves and make you restless. No need to give up your favorite coffee—no need to buy expensive coffee substitutes.

Tums are so agreeable, refreshing and convenient that you will want to carry a roll with you always, in pocket or purse. Get a roll of Tums today at any drug store... They are only 10 cents.

FREE *Beautiful new gold and blue 1934 Calendar-Thermometer. Also samples* **TUMS** *and* **NR**—*Just send name and address, enclosing stamp, to*
A. H. LEWIS COMPANY, Dept. BA-3, ST. LOUIS, MO.

NRA MEMBER U.S. WE DO OUR PART

GET 2 ROLLS FREE

Thousands of people are buying Tums in the convenient $1 box containing twelve rolls, thus getting two rolls free.

TUMS FOR THE TUMMY

TUMS ARE ANTACID
... Not a Laxative
For a laxative, use the safe, dependable Vegetable corrective **NR** (NATURE'S REMEDY). Only 25c.

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